

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **Figurative transportations and the performativity of home**

**a dramaturgical study of the representations of home in the prose plays of Henrik Ibsen and their reverberations in the work of Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker.**

Mozic, Jernej

*Award date:*  
2020

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Roehampton

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***Figurative Transportations and the Performativity of Home:  
a Dramaturgical Study of the Representations of Home in the Prose  
Plays of Henrik Ibsen and Their Reverberations in the Work of Mona  
Hatoum and Bobby Baker***

by Jernej Mozic, BA, MA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance

University of Roehampton

2019

## **Abstract**

This thesis puts the prose plays of Norwegian realist playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) in relation to the work of contemporary, postmodern artists Mona Hatoum (1952) and Bobby Baker (1950). It proposes that common to all is a focus on home as a multivalent concept which they examine through distinct but also connected critiques of a particular meaning of home, the domestic space. Home has been theorised in several branches of scholarship but also deemed a highly subjective construct. The thesis reconfigures the diverse interpretations of home through an appropriation of the idea of performativity and argues that the various ways in which we encounter it – as house, family, nation, a sense of comfort or estrangement but also, for example, as housework – constitute the performative expressions (or performativities) of home. The thesis then argues that these performativities in the work of Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker incite figurative transportations (or transportive spectatorial experiences) for the audience.

In Ibsen's drama the critique of home involves performative expressions such as the material culture of the domestic – the furnishings – as well as the characters' interpersonal behaviours. The thesis examines how Ibsen interplays these elements to expose a false idea(lization) of home prevalent in the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. By way of a dramaturgical analysis of selected plays, the thesis proposes Ibsen's work as a lens through which the examinations of home in the work of Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker can be understood. Situated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Hatoum's and Baker's critiques respond to distinct political relations of power that shape their experiences of home. Hatoum employs the figure of exile to convey loss and displacement in a manner that exhibits a dramaturgical correlation to Ibsen. Bobby Baker's focus are housework and food through which she examines the position of women in society also in ways that can be linked to Ibsen's drama.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would not have been able to write this thesis without the incisive, generous, and thoughtful guidance from my mentors, Professor Joe Kelleher and Professor Graham White – thank you.

## **Performativity and Figurative Transportations: Home in Theatre and Performance**

### **Confronted by Home: a Prefatory Vignette**

In the concluding scenes of *Orgy of Tolerance* (2009) by the Belgian dance theatre company Troubleyn, the performers unleash a daring, unsavoury torrent of verbal abuse. Nothing and no one escapes their insults. Targets include religions, nationalities, minorities, the disabled, professions of all kinds, objects and even animals. As one reviewer described it, ‘everyone can go fuck themselves, including Jews and Arabs, Americans and Europeans [and even] the Eskimos who were not important enough to mention in the performance’.<sup>1</sup> Provocative throughout, *Orgy of Tolerance* explores modern-day materialistic attitudes and consumerism by way of a mixture of spoken word and physical movement, interplaying vulgarity with humour, terror and the questioning of the notion of political correctness.

The cast is international and the language used in the performance is English. At times, however, members of the ensemble revert to their mother tongues. This transition is particularly notable in the offending sequence at the end. On the occasion of the company’s visit to the London Southbank in 2009, amid nationally charged insults directed at the likes of world powers such as America, India and France, a brief and rather insignificant reference was made to two neighbouring countries on the edge of central Europe – Slovenia and Croatia. Formerly part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, both republics declared independence in the early 1990s, a split that, particularly in the case of Croatia, caused devastation to large parts of its territory and the loss of many lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurens De Vos, “Jan Fabre’s Crusade against Shopping Culture” in *A Journal of Performance and Art* Vol.31, Issue 3 (2009), 72.

Today Slovenia and Croatia are aspiring democracies, one an established member of the European Union (EU), the other its most recent recruit. The trade ties between the two are relatively strong and the strategic partnership is aided by the similarities in the languages. One question that has sparked controversy concerns a small part of the boundary between the countries which runs across a stretch of the Adriatic Sea. The precise geographical coordinates of this border have been the bone of contention since the breakup of Yugoslavia. In 2017 the dispute was settled by the EU's international arbitration and though the decision, that is, the mapping of the border, is binding for both parties, political rhetoric over the outcome continues and no conclusion has been reached.

Back to the final scenes of *Orgy of Tolerance* at the Southbank. The international production involves several Croatian performers, one of whom at one point shouts: "Fuck you Slovenians! *Nećete dobiti hrvatsko more!*" (*You will not own Croatian sea!*). Merely one in the string of many, the statement is rapidly followed by further expletives, its message quelled by the force of the unending torrent of abuse. As a Slovenian living in London, these words shaped the theatrical experience of that evening. There may have been other Slovenes in the audience (and Croats too) but in the moment of its utterance, the sentence constituted a confrontational address, fleetingly leading to a naïve conviction that its message was meant exclusively for me. I was singled out by an act of theatre, spoken to in unexpected fashion, and the assumption that what was said would have been completely lost on most (if not all) of the auditorium only intensified the encounter.

Where I was *from* suddenly began to matter. A proliferation of thoughts hastened to make sense of the disorienting feelings: images of national symbols, landmarks, political figures, and fragments of recent history intertwined with memories of everyday life such as familial relations, the rooms of the childhood house, the local community and traditions. Through the evocation of nationality, theatre incited a contemplation on a range of factors that could be assembled under a single word – home. Questions arose. What shapes one's sense of home? How does home define a person? How are the meanings of home expressed through theatre? The pages that follow engage in looking for some possible answers.

## Key Ideas and an Overview of the Thesis: Broad Brushes

This thesis examines how the representations of home in theatre and performance animate spectatorial sensibilities. Its particular focus is the work of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, sculptor and installationist Mona Hatoum, of Palestinian descent, and performance artist Bobby Baker from England, all of whom make home a primary subject of their artistic inquiry. I read the prose plays of Henrik Ibsen as a kind of urtext, a conceptual lens (or precursor) to the work of the contemporary artists, owing to his important historical role in the pursuit of the questions of home in the theatre, as I expand on later in this Introduction.

In the account of *Orgy of Tolerance*, home is conjured up through a politically topical remark and its effect on the occasion is heightened by the use of a language that the majority of the audience are likely to be unfamiliar with. Although home does not constitute a central theme and the association only comes about through a personal encounter with the piece, the experience conveys the key ideas that this study explores: (1) the extendible quality of home as a notion that takes on a range of cultural meanings, in this case national identity, as well as entirely subjective renderings (largely made up of individual perceptions, emotions or recollections) – what I term the performativity of home – and (2) the capacity of this broad conception of home to elicit a viewer's response which, following the philosopher Martin Heidegger, I refer to as figurative transportation. I elaborate on these two concepts in the course of the Introduction.

The brief outline of my experience of *Orgy of Tolerance* brings together (or even confronts) reflections on two spatialities: the idea of the nation and the domestic environment. This juxtaposition highlights home as what cultural geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, in their extensive critical study *Home* (2006), call a 'multi-scalar'<sup>2</sup> concept. As they argue, human

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<sup>2</sup> Alison Blunt, Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006), 27.



senses [of home as place] are constructed across diverse scales, ranging from the body and the household, to the city, nation and globe. [...] Feelings of belonging and relations with others could be [...] stretched across transnational space, or located on a park bench.<sup>3</sup>

The theorists further expand that along with being ‘a multi-layered geographical concept’<sup>4</sup> home is also ‘a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings’<sup>5</sup> and therefore ‘an imaginary’<sup>6</sup> but even as such it is indelibly linked to the materiality of location. What is common to the three artists assembled in this thesis is that their representations of home, though formally disparate, spread across the many spatial layers of home. They interrogate the relationship between the material (spatial) and the imaginative home and explore how home constitutes identities as well as how the meaning of home is shaped and regulated through economic, political and social structures. Here, then, surface the main parameters of home that are at work throughout this thesis, proposing home as a relational integration of a number of cultural and natural factors represented through fields of human undertaking as varied as geography and psychology, politics and interior decoration, travel and cookery – and their intersections.

A set of such varied parameters necessitates a careful weaving of their many threads. This thesis proceeds from what is arguably the most commonly evoked sense of home: the sphere of the domestic. Engagement with a particular conception of the domestic, one which emerged in the nineteenth century and continues to shape the meaning of home in the present day, is central to the oeuvres of all three artists. From it, however, run many other strands of the meanings of home, including larger geographical units such as the nation as well as notions such as affect or belonging. Unpacking them, the thesis devotes a chapter to each of the artists with the distinction that Henrik Ibsen is examined independently while

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker are explored both in relation to Ibsen and – in slightly more limited scope than Ibsen – on their own. Although the three are a century and more apart, Ibsen (on one side) and Hatoum and Baker (on the other) have in common that they interrogate what makes up a sense of home.

I examine this commonality methodically through wide-ranging dramaturgical analysis, pursuing a twofold argument. Firstly, I propose that their treatment of home involves a broad range of ideas, actions, gestures, symbols and feelings – what I will call the performativity of home. Secondly, I contend that their meditations on home possess a transportive quality which can provoke us, members of the audience, to critically reflect on our own meanings of home in a manner reminiscent of the theories of Martin Heidegger, in particular his influential essays “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1950) and “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1952). The performativity of home involves a complex and necessarily multidisciplinary framework while Heidegger’s notion of transportivity, too, will require careful explanation. Each will be discussed in a separate section later in the chapter, after I have delineated the scholarly territory in which this thesis locates itself.

### **Situating the Project: Modern Drama, Contemporary Art, Place, Home**

This section focuses on the scholarship in the fields of theatre and performance studies that the thesis engages with and outlines the ways in which my research contributes to these debates. In the opening pages of *Staging Places: the Geography of Modern Drama* (1997), an important contribution to the study of space in drama, Una Chaudhuri sets out her primary intention – to examine ‘that essential element of all theatrical representation: space.’<sup>7</sup> Places, spaces and their representations elicit for Chaudhuri a wealth of relationships that call for scholarly disentangling, ‘a new methodology for drama and theater studies, a “geography” of theater capable of replacing – or at least significantly

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<sup>7</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), xi.

supplementing – its familiar “history.”<sup>8</sup> On this quest, Chaudhuri discusses some of the earliest canonical works of the genre of modern drama by Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Eugene O’Neill as well as mid-twentieth century dramas of Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett and end-of-century plays by the younger, more multicultural generation of American writers such as David Henry Hwang and Suzan-Lori Parks. As Chaudhuri notes, the plays she analyses convey ‘a recurrent sense that dramatic structure reflects deeply ingrained convictions about the mutually constructive relations between people and place.’<sup>9</sup> The place that concerns Chaudhuri the most is the genre’s ‘privileged setting [which] is the family home.’<sup>10</sup> More than merely an “element” of theatrical representation (albeit a crucial one), this home constitutes ‘a problem’<sup>11</sup> that consumes modern drama from its beginnings at the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. She labels this problem as ‘geopathology’<sup>12</sup> in which ‘[w]ho one is and who one can be are [...] a function of *where* one is and how one experiences that place.’<sup>13</sup>

In the span of over a hundred years that Chaudhuri’s study surveys, modern drama reveals itself as ‘an ongoing *experiment* with place’<sup>14</sup> with differing figurations as it moves from naturalism through to ‘expressionism and symbolism to absurdism, epic theater, and other experimental movements’.<sup>15</sup> It is Chaudhuri’s examination of the early, naturalistic period of modern drama that interests me in particular as it involves Henrik Ibsen, the principal object of analysis in this thesis. As she writes, the drama of the time is marked by a ‘culturally determined symbology of home, replete with all those powerful and empowering associations to space as are organized by the notion of belonging’<sup>16</sup>. This is ‘supported by

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

the spatial arrangements of naturalism, which function according to a logic of *total visibility*.<sup>17</sup> She expands on this as follows:

[b]elonging and related concepts such as privacy, inclusion, participation, occupy the ideological heart of modern drama, which is above all else a drama about place, and, more specifically, about place as understood through, around, and beyond the figure of *home*. [...] The idea of home that emerges from this [...] establishes a discourse that can be imagined as a semantic spectrum whose two poles are occupied by the tropes of belonging and exile.<sup>18</sup>

Between the two tropal polarities – one espousing home as a stable site of identity formation, the other an escape from it – the dramatist of naturalism envisions this “discourse” to play out on a ‘well-stocked stage’<sup>19</sup> which proffers for the spectator a ‘contract of total visibility, total knowledge’<sup>20</sup>, that is to say, the placement of the characters into visually defined settings of material culture that espouse a social position and the associated (moral, political, economic) codes of this environment. Ibsen’s prose plays are almost exclusively set in the realm of the domestic, highlighting a preoccupation with place as a determining element of a dramatic situation, of a character’s actions, intentions and desires. There exists here a level of imbrication between place and home in which home is not one of many places but rather *the* place of early modern drama. Attached to this place is a personal history (or in Chaudhuri’s term “belonging”). How a character behaves derives from their connection to this place and factors into their understanding of the world. A character’s past, revealed through dialogue, is as alive as their present.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Ibsen's prose oeuvre propounds realism – people in everyday life making sense of events, themselves and others by means of conversation. This is a powerful model of drama that has survived into the twenty-first century. What has also endured from Ibsen's time is the understanding of home nestled between the dialectical points of its need for stasis and the desire for flight. According to Chaudhuri, the 'originally established'<sup>21</sup> (naturalistic) treatment of home in modern drama has modified, moving 'towards an increasingly precise and unsentimental recognition of home *as* a discourse, replete with ideological antecedents and consequences.'<sup>22</sup> She observes this gradual transformation mainly through the figure of 'a failed homecoming plot'<sup>23</sup>. In his review of the book, Owen E. Brady sums up Chaudhuri's reading of Pinter's *Homecoming* (1965) and Sam Shepherd's *Buried Child* (1978) as marking

the turning point in the geopathology of modern drama. The discourse of home generated by realism is challenged and deconstructed. What results is a new discourse playing on and ironizing the overdetermined thematic of home in earlier drama. [...] While building on the same tropes of place as earlier drama, these plays no longer find home the determinant of identity.<sup>24</sup>

In Chaudhuri's later discussion of the (multicultural) plays written in the final decades of the twentieth century, the foundational geopathology of naturalism is revised even further as it indicates something of a 'postgeopathic'<sup>25</sup> turn which calls for the engagement of poststructuralist critical concepts, notably Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia'<sup>26</sup> –

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Owen E. Brady, "Review of *Staging Place: Geography of Modern Drama*" in *Text and Performance Quarterly* Vol. 17, Issue 1 (1997), 132.

<sup>25</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces" in *Diacritics* Vol. 16, No. 1 (1986), 24. Foucault writes: 'The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, [...] we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. [...] [There are] utopias [which] are sites with no real place [...]

in Chaudhuri's interpretation 'a place capable of containing within it many different even incompatible places'<sup>27</sup> or what could be described as a dispersal of the "unitary" place of modern drama's initial, nineteenth-century reckoning. Thus she notes that in the 'drama of multiculturalism [...] are outlines of a new *heterotopic* account of the relationship between persons and places. This account begins by creatively confronting the problem of place, regarding it as a challenge and an invitation rather than as a tragic impasse.'<sup>28</sup>

It is worth pointing out the influence that Chaudhuri's study has exerted since publication. In *Performing Dream Homes: Theater and the Spatial Politics of the Domestic Sphere* (2019), a collection of essays that 'explore critically the ways that [theatre] performances use domestic space'<sup>29</sup>, editors Emily Klein, Jennifer-Scott Mobley, Jill Stevenson review the extensive scholarship on the 'study of space'<sup>30</sup> within theatre and performance studies. They posit that Chaudhuri's book, and in particular the concept of "geopathology", presents 'one of the most significant works in this field'<sup>31</sup>. Made more than two decades after its emergence, the remark demonstrates the standing of the author's writings as indicative of the field of the theatrical study of space.

Chaudhuri's claim of a sort of transformational journey of home as place to home as a developing, constantly shifting discourse through twentieth-century modern drama provides the broad framework for my discussion. Her examination of realism and naturalism considers Ibsen's prose plays among the earliest examples of the genre's problematics of home, suspended between the oppositional points of "belonging" and "exile", or as she also phrases it, 'the collision [...] of two incommensurable desires: the desire for a stable

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that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. There are also [...] real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society [...] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.'

<sup>27</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>29</sup> Emily Klein, Jennifer-Scott Mobley, Jill Stevenson eds., *Performing Dream Homes: Theater and the Spatial Politics of the Domestic Sphere* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

container for identity and the desire to deterritorialize the self.’<sup>32</sup> With Ibsen on one side (and the focus of Chapter 1) and Bobby Baker and Mona Hatoum on the other, I look at the transformations in the conceptions of home not within the dramatic convention but in its relation to the forms of performance art and visual art. My inquiry is, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3, set within a similar (slightly extended) time frame to Chaudhuri’s – that of the twentieth and the early decades of the twenty-first centuries – but revolves around what I consider two dominant social problematics of home in that period. They are the displacement of people due to war and political conflict and the position of women in society and both can be conceived of as underscored by Chaudhuri’s delineation between the need to feel a sense of inclusion, of being part of a *somewhere*, and the need to detach from it. In other words, the presence of these two opposing tendencies is structurally inherent to how Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker inflect home in their work.

Another dimension of home that Una Chaudhuri discusses in relation to Ibsen and that can be applied to the work of Hatoum and Baker is what she calls ‘the politics [...] of being at home’<sup>33</sup>. For Chaudhuri, Ibsen’s realist plays are illustrative of the representation of the ‘literalized home’<sup>34</sup>, the physical domestic space with its recognizable features of material culture, which stages ‘the deterministic power as well as the crisis of this concept.’<sup>35</sup> Chaudhuri suggests that one way Ibsen examines this “crisis” is through the use of ‘architectural symbols, [the] climbable towers, slammable doors and burnable buildings’ which help him to ‘construct the domestic space as a problematic’<sup>36</sup>. While Chaudhuri’s book is on the whole less focused on architectonic imagery, I look at the role of such elements as rooms, doors and stoves in Chapter 1, and do so in relation to the phrase ‘the tyranny of furniture’<sup>37</sup> used by the Guardian critic Michael Billington in reference to Ibsen’s

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<sup>32</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Michael Billington “The Troll in the Drawing Room.” *Guardian*, 15 February, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/feb/15/theatre.artsfeatures>.

realistic plays. I retain the emphasis on the use of domestic objects and spaces to problematize home in both Chapters 2 and 3.

A sustained account of what Chaudhuri calls the “crisis” of home and also the architecture of home in Ibsen’s prose oeuvre – and one that (with some expansion of the sources) can be linked to Hatoum and Baker – has been provided in Mark B. Sandberg’s *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (2015). Sandberg argues that Ibsen’s prose plays can be seen ‘as part of a more general “thickening” of architectural metaphor in late nineteenth-century Western Culture and literature [which appealed to] any number of other writers for whom built structure was anything but a simple and transparent setting for action’<sup>38</sup>, including Edgar Allan Poe, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens and George Bernard Shaw. If Chaudhuri presents a philosophically tilted take on the problematic of home in the theatre over a period of time, Sandberg’s project can be viewed as a kind of spatial and temporal narrowing-down of that inquiry. He examines Ibsen’s theatrical treatment of home with a focus on the sociocultural resonance of the dramatist’s ideas among his contemporaries in Scandinavia. This is not to say that Sandberg’s study is devoid of abstract concepts – to the contrary, his primary interest is Ibsen’s employment of metaphorical devices in the creation of the meanings of home. In the early part, Sandberg draws attention to Ibsen’s use of the figure of the uncanny. He points to Nicholas Royle’s comprehensive study of the uncanny, a term which, as Royle himself notes, ‘has been a focus of critical, literary, philosophical and political reflection from at least the mid nineteenth century to the present – from Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, to Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida.’<sup>39</sup>

The range of scholars who have engaged with the phenomenon is reflected in the range of its applications. Following Royle, Sandberg identifies two influential readings for his discussion, that of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and architectural historian Anthony Vidler. As Sandberg reports, Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” (1919) is considered ‘the

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<sup>38</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 3-4.



touchstone articulation of the theories<sup>40</sup> of the term. The Austrian theorist characterised the *unheimlich* (in his mother tongue) as ‘that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar.’<sup>41</sup> Sandberg summarizes Freud’s thoughts as follows: ‘something *unheimlich* is not merely the familiar made strange, but the revelation of a fundamental link between the two: the uncanny is a reappearance of something formerly familiar that has been made strange through the process of repression.’<sup>42</sup> To tease out incidences of the uncanny in Ibsen’s plays, Sandberg combines Freud’s model with ‘the sociocultural, architectural extension thereof’ by Anthony Vidler who is a representative of the Anglo-American critical ‘angle’<sup>43</sup> within the field.

In this tradition, the term “uncanny” has been provided with the translational variant ‘the unhomely’<sup>44</sup> which indicates, according to Sandberg, ‘a paradigm shift that supplements the psychoanalytic with sociocultural models of explanation.’<sup>45</sup> At the heart of Vidler’s account is, writes Sandberg, ‘the connection between modernity, architecture, and the unhomely [which traces] a trajectory of displacement from home that begins in late eighteenth-century Romantic theorists and continues through postmodernism.’<sup>46</sup> The transition from *unheimlich* to unhomely ‘produces a more socially inflected argument that follows a series of permutations, [including] the secure bourgeois home of the early nineteenth century, leading through the “economic and social estrangement” experienced [...] in the urbanization of modern cities’<sup>47</sup> and into the late twentieth century.

Through the extension of the psychoanalytical into the sociocultural, Sandberg introduces the Danish and Norwegian counterparts (but not always direct semantic

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<sup>40</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 18.

<sup>41</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), Vol. 17, 220.

<sup>42</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), x.

<sup>45</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

equivalents) to homely and unhomely – ‘*hyggelig* and *uhyggelig*’<sup>48</sup> – and explores, by way of, to quote from the review by theatre scholar Sos Eltis, ‘perceptive analysis of the language’<sup>49</sup> of the plays, how these (and cognate terms such as the noun *hygge*, loosely translated as cosiness) occur in the vocabulary of Ibsen’s characters. Their incidence, Sandberg suggests, often reveals the ‘problem of a residual past’<sup>50</sup>, that is of an unexpected return of some hidden information or an unresolved fragment of personal history that comes to the fore. He complements this by looking at the reception of the plays in Scandinavia, finding that in their responses the critics invariably resorted to the very lexemes to discuss the dramas, or in other words, “hyggelig” and “uhyggelig” became the commonly used qualifiers for the impressions they had formed. Sandberg therefore maintains that Ibsen’s prose works played a role in shifting the social consciousness in the region, creating a discursive space in which the association of home with the sense of unease became more prevalent: ‘in the late nineteenth century and beyond, with Ibsen’s help, it became possible as a dissenting view to raise philosophical and intellectual objections to *hygge*, attacking a concept that in commonsense terms would otherwise seem unassailable, especially since the metaphors of *hygge* and home are so tightly connected to an embodied sense of [domestic] comfort.’<sup>51</sup>

The analysis of the uncanny leads Sandberg to his main interest which is Ibsen’s ‘attack on the notion of domestic comfort and security’<sup>52</sup>, that is, an idealised image of the domestic as bliss and an emotional retreat governed by convivial relationships with loved ones. Sandberg shows that Ibsen does not subscribe to this view and that from (at least) the late 1870s he opposes it play after play.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>49</sup> Sos Eltis, “Review of Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny*” in *Modern Drama Journal*, Vol. 59, Number 3 (2016), 396.

<sup>50</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 25.

Ibsen introduced a powerful intellectual legitimacy to the alternative position, a suspicion of the domestic that introduced hesitation and contingency into previously unassailable values. Ibsen's treatment of home [...] was an extended experiment that deconstructed the most "natural" domestic ideologies of the late nineteenth century. [...] Ibsen suggests in his plays that the notion of true or "proper" home was a borrowed concept, an image, an idea, or an assumption about ideal families that did not proceed from real experience.<sup>53</sup>

This dissonance between the idealistic view and the realities of domestic habitation that Sandberg identifies in Ibsen is a thread that runs through the chapters that follow. The next section of the Introduction will look at how home as domestic space was conceived of in the nineteenth century to provide the broader sociocultural context to the perceptions that Ibsen challenged in his drama but also to suggest how this conceptualisation of home resonates at the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries so as to establish the link between Ibsen and Hatoum and Baker more explicitly. Throughout the thesis, the thread of tension between idealisation and the reality of home is informed by what could be referred to as more abstract questions of home, as exemplified in the work of Chaudhuri, as well as the awareness of the social contexts and the relations of power from which the artists emerge, as exemplified in Sandberg's reading of Ibsen.

However, my particular interest is the employment of domestic spaces and objects and the habitational dispositions that are either articulated or evoked in the works of the three artists. I argue that the interrelation of these elements calls for a critical reflection on our own dwelling practices (what I later describe as the transportive quality of art) and is manifested through the performativities of home. The latter are, as I will expand on shortly, the expressions of home in the everyday which affirm how much of human undertaking is pervaded by our experience as well as our conceptions of domestic habitation. In the work of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 86.

Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker I see these elements as the primary tools of the artists' respective critiques of home, accounts that dismantle received or "borrowed" (to use Sandberg's term) notions of home as a locus of comfort, and (often familial) fulfilment.

There have been several notable studies on home in the fields of drama, theatre and performance in recent years but this is, arguably, still an under-represented area of research. One example in a similar vein to Chaudhuri and Sandberg is Nicolas Grene's *Home on Stage: Domestic Spaces of Modern Drama* (2014) which examines 'the persistent afterlife of the [nineteenth-century] naturalistic home on the stage through the twentieth century'<sup>54</sup> and looks at the questions of class, gender, the parallels of the domestic and the national as well as, like Chaudhuri, the figure of the problematic return to home in the works of canonical dramatists such as Chekhov, O'Neill, Beckett and Pinter. Grene attributes to Ibsen a pioneering role in quite an overt way, by subtitling the introductory chapter "Ibsen and After"<sup>55</sup>. Writing specifically about *A Doll's House* (1879), he proposes that in moving 'inward into a purely domestic space, [Ibsen] created a drama of the interior that was to provide a new theatrical paradigm for a century to come'<sup>56</sup>, thus upholding Chaudhuri's position that in the discussion of home in the theatre of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries Ibsen cannot be sidestepped – something I reaffirm in Chapter 1.

Within this scholarly landscape we might also note Dorothy Chansky's *Kitchen Sink Realisms: Domestic Labor, Dining, and Drama in American Theatre* (2015). Borrowing (part of) its title from the label that was originally ascribed to post Second World War British drama (most commonly associated with John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*<sup>57</sup>), the study, as the author states, is a 'feminist history [that] investigates the unremittingly gendered nature of virtually all domestic labor portrayed on the American

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholas, Grene, *Staging Home: Domestic Spaces in Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>57</sup> See Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

stage<sup>58</sup> in the twentieth century. Chansky draws attention to less known works that examine women's work in the home as well as re-reads some of the "classics" like Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) from this viewpoint and offers an important re-evaluation of the genre. Although Chansky's focus is clearly on plays from America, her introductory chapter acknowledges the foundational role of such authors as Zola and Strindberg in establishing theatrical naturalism, however, she does not seek to establish a thematic lineage with Ibsen's portrayal of housework in plays like *The Wild Duck* (1884) which, as I discuss in Chapter 2, is one of the earliest feminist renderings of women's domestic labour in the theatre.

In contemporary art, home has received attention in studies such as *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (2015) by Imogen Racz and *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art* (2017) by Claudette Lauzon. Both authors situate their analyses within the present-day globalised society strained by geopolitical pressures to which artists are increasingly responding through themes of dislocation and alienation from home. While Racz mainly surveys the Anglo-American sculptural practice and divides her discussion into thematic clusters like "Female Space" and "Objects, Sentiment and Memory", interplaying critical frameworks such as feminism and psychoanalysis<sup>59</sup>, Lauzon offers a comparatively more nuanced examination which looks at a transnational assembly of artists. In fact, Lauzon opens her book with a brief account of Hatoum's installation *Mobile Home* (2005) which she considers somewhat illustrative of the 'fractured, fragile and otherwise unsettled space'<sup>60</sup> of inhabitation that constitutes a prevalent tendency in contemporary practice. For Lauzon, this kind of artwork

functions in two ways: first to construct (literally and figuratively) a scaffold or structure around loss that both reflects and makes space for its palpable materiality [...] and second, to imagine this structure as a liminal space that

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<sup>58</sup> Dorothy Chansky, *Kitchen Sink Realisms: Domestic Labor, Dining, and Drama in American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>59</sup> See Imogen Racz, *Art and the Home: Comfort, Alienation and the Everyday* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2015)

<sup>60</sup> Claudette Lauzon, *The Unmaking of Home in Contemporary Art* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017), 4.

articulates the fragility of self-other relations through the motif of home, a concept that has itself become as fragmented, disillusioned, and fragile, as the concept of self in contemporary society.<sup>61</sup>

The “unmaking” traced by Lauzon is set in a world that has to contend with displacements, migration and multicultural tensions, all of which contribute to the ongoing process of the construction of subjectivity. The art that emerges from this world ‘conveys home as a place [...] where longing is also a kind of belonging, and absence is also a kind of presence, [providing] new models of intersubjectivity that recognize the embedded, vulnerabilities of memory, inhabitation, and indeed human existence.’<sup>62</sup> I would argue that here Lauzon outlines the sort of distrust of home that Sandberg assigns to Ibsen’s prose plays – one that is, obviously, shaped by the experience of the current moment as Ibsen’s was inextricably tied to his own present.

My aim in this thesis is to examine Ibsen’s representations of home away from the territory of modern drama in which it is, apparently, already well charted. Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker are not artists one would immediately associate with the playwright and bringing the three together in this way throws up a number of disparities – of time period, geography, art form, to name only a few (I look at this later in the Introduction as well as throughout the remaining chapters). I propose, however, that home is what ties them together. More precisely, the conception of home that Ibsen attacks in his plays is a recalcitrant human construct which survives (in modification) into our time and Hatoum and Baker critique (or dismantle) it within their own particular sets of cultural circumstances with equal artistic inventiveness and conviction. As part of this argument, I show how the three artists’ interrogation of home operates across the forms of drama, visual art and performance art by means of cognate dramaturgical procedures.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

A similar task – the consideration of home in dramatic works and forms of contemporary art – has, in part, been undertaken in the aforementioned *Performing Dream Homes: Theater and the Spatial Politics of the Domestic Sphere* where editors Klein et al. bring together contributions from scholars of theatre history, cultural studies but also gender studies that draw on the dramatic tradition as well as site-specific art and acts of performance in everyday life. The essays offer ‘a focused examination of home as a unique category within the spatial turn’<sup>63</sup> (of which Chaudhuri’s *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* is an important part) in theatre and performance, engaging particularly with ‘the themes [...] of dislocation, rootlessness [and] the ordinary’<sup>64</sup> and examining how home is ‘both performatively and materially constructed’<sup>65</sup> across works of art from different disciplines. However, the research that is particularly pertinent in this regard has been conducted by American scholar Eleanor Skimin who has sought to reconcile apparent thematic confluences alongside formal disparities in drama and performance art through the figure of the sedentary pose in ‘domestic dramas of bourgeois sitting rooms’<sup>66</sup> and the performance piece *The Artist is Present* (2010) by Marina Abramović. In this work, the venue for which was the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), Abramović ‘sat daily on a chair in the atrium’<sup>67</sup> while ‘[m]embers of the public were invited to sit opposite her for as long as they desired.’<sup>68</sup> As Skimin notes, sitting is a prevalent posture in the dramas of nineteenth-century realist theatre and registering a parallel with the project of Abramović she identifies a set of thought-provoking questions:

What are we able to see when we set, say, a tête-à-tête, between Nora and her husband Torvald in the sitting room of *A Doll’s House* (1879) alongside the scene of Abramović’s sitting face-to-face with a visitor in a museum?

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<sup>63</sup> Emily Klein, Jennifer-Scott Mobley, Jill Stevenson eds., *Performing Dream Homes: Theater and the Spatial Politics of the Domestic Sphere* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>66</sup> Eleanor Skimin, “Reproducing the White Bourgeois” in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 62, Issue 1 (2018), 80.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

How [...] might we think about the history of performance art not only as a practice that, coming out of the historical avant-garde, has developed as a repudiation or critique of the white bourgeois realist theatre of the late-nineteenth century, but also as the inheritor and reproducer of its powerfully persuasive legacies? In what ways has performance art abided by the conventions, rhetorics and ideology of conventional theatre?<sup>69</sup>

For Skimin the response(s) can be attempted by thinking about the sedentary figure in relation to how the white bourgeois culture conceives of itself through the idea of the ‘interior life of the still body.’<sup>70</sup> Using Skimin’s approach as a model, this thesis, by way of original contribution, reframes the above questions, narrowing them down to a certain flawed yet enduring nineteenth-century idea of home which the three artists upend in different historical periods, employing diverse artistic principles and experiencing varying social, political, economic conditions and relations of power, and by demonstrating the dramaturgical affinities between them that surface in the process.

As will become more apparent through the individual chapters, the theme of home has received a substantial amount of attention in critical discussions of the work of Ibsen, Baker and Hatoum. However, with the exception of a suggestion of a tenuous parallel between Ibsen’s realistic interiors and Mona Hatoum’s installations noted by art historian Patricia Falguières (which we will come to in Chapter 2), neither explicit nor extended connections between the three artists appear to have been made so far in theatre and performance scholarship. In the chapters that follow, I show that Hatoum’s and Baker’s art practices are indexical of two of the key ways in which home has been understood in the twentieth and the twentieth-first centuries. They are the displacement of people as a result of international war conflicts and the resulting social and economic devastation and the role of women in the home and their position in society.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



In both cases, I relate their problematizing of home to Ibsen. The connection I identify between him and Hatoum builds on the figure of exile which they experience and express quite differently but, as I show by drawing on the writings of the twentieth-century French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, their sensibilities to the questions of home from considerable geographical distance furnish them with a kindred perspective, what Bachelard referred to as artistic ‘miniature’<sup>71</sup>. The link between Ibsen and Baker is established through Ibsen’s portrayal of women in plays such as *A Doll’s House* and *The Wild Duck* in which he not only creates dramaturgically well-rounded and complex female characters but also polemicizes the position of women in a culture dominated by ‘an exclusively male society’<sup>72</sup>, as noted by Ibsen, according to theatre scholar Gail Finney. I examine Bobby Baker’s performance pieces produced a century and more after Ibsen as part of this socially critical lineage in the continued struggle of women for greater gender equality.

While I rely on a wide range of sources throughout the thesis, some merit specific mention in this part of the Introduction. Arguably the most comprehensive publication on Ibsen in the twenty-first century to date is Toril Moi’s *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (2006). Moi – whose book shapes much of the thinking about the dramatist in this study<sup>73</sup> – is concerned with firmly anchoring Ibsen in the artistic realm of modernism and embarks on a systematic study of some of the key aesthetic movements of the nineteenth century, including realism and idealism, to demonstrate that ‘Ibsen is the founder of modern theatre.’<sup>74</sup> Her discussion of Ibsen’s fraught relationship with the ideology of (German) idealism, which was particularly dominant in the first half of the nineteenth century, enables us to better understand the sheer complexity of his transition from writing in verse to embracing the portrayal of everyday life (with all its manifold domestic nuances) in the prose plays. Moi’s analysis of the dramas continues a rich tradition

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<sup>71</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 151.

<sup>72</sup> Gail Finney, “Ibsen and Feminism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. James McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

<sup>73</sup> Moi organises her work by using subheadings for sections of chapters. It should be noted that this thesis uses this organisational principle independently.

<sup>74</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17.

of which an important part is John Northam's *Ibsen's Dramatic Method* (1953), one of the first dramaturgical assessments of Ibsen's realist oeuvre in English. Northam maintains that 'Ibsen presents his characters not only through dialogue but also through the suggestiveness of visual details contained in his visually important stage-directions.'<sup>75</sup> He attaches importance to elements like domestic objects that surround the characters (as does this thesis) and also their clothing, locating in these a 'concealed symbolism'<sup>76</sup> that brings us closer to disentangling Ibsen's dramatic situations more fully.

Scholarly criticism on Mona Hatoum comprises monographs as well as journal articles and as a practising artist, she (in obvious contrast to Ibsen) also discusses (in lectures and through writing) the motivations and the creative processes in her own work. Her wide-ranging oeuvre includes performance pieces, video, sculpture and installation and, as Chapter 2 will show, the questions of home recurrently feature in all of these media. Home for Mona Hatoum is invariably a meditation on a migratory existence in the contemporary world, on the elusiveness of a sense belonging and on its loss (material and emotional). In Hatoum scholarship home is also indelibly linked with her identity (my reference to critics such as Sheena Wagstaff, Guy Brett and Clarrie Wallis will demonstrate this) as a descendent of Palestinian parents and home is thus a highly politically charged entity, an issue which this thesis engages with in some detail.

Like Hatoum, Bobby Baker is an active performance maker and intellectual. The meanings of home she explores have attracted the interest of feminist theatre scholars such as Geraldine Harris and Elaine Aston, drawing attention to the gendered understanding of the domestic space but also to the position of women in society more broadly. A collection of journal articles examining her oeuvre and interviews with the artist has been compiled in the book *Redeeming Features of Daily Life* (2007) which is an invaluable resource, charting Baker's career trajectory from its very beginnings. Through the notion of gender and its position in the field of feminism a connection between Baker and Ibsen's influential

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<sup>75</sup> John Northam, *Ibsen's Dramatic Method* (Oslo: Univertetsforlaget, 1971), 11.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

portrayal of women in his drama can be quite compelling, but as Chapter 3 demonstrates a lot is at stake when drawing these parallels and careful consideration is required.

While this section has situated the project in the context of the key reference points that inform the discussion, the work of defining how the artists examine home continues throughout the chapters. The contribution that this study hopes to make in relation to the fields of theatre and performance is further elaborated in the section of this Introduction titled “The Studied Artists: Modern(ism), Postmodern(ism)”. In what follows immediately below, however, I look at the key terms that shape the particular nineteenth-century idea of home which Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker put under pressure in their artistic practices.

### **Public, Private, Interior, Domesticity**

Public, private, interior and domesticity are some of the key tropes in this thesis. The present sections draw on the writings of sociologist Richard Sennett and architectural scholar Charles Rice to show how in the nineteenth century there sprang up (with sure momentum from the preceding decades) a coalescence of these tropes in relation to the material entity – the edifice – of home. As these authors enable us to see, comfort, seclusion and subjectivity became pervasive concepts in this period and the notion of family acquired new shades of meaning. These words remain in use today and while they may mean something different, the work of Sennett and Rice points to the ways in which they bear the traces of their predecessors – their past lives in their present.

While “private”, “interior” and “domesticity” are cognate words, they acquire very specific meanings at the time in history which here provides the basis for the discussion of Ibsen and subsequently his relation to Hatoum and Baker. The period in question concerns the final decades of the eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth. The ensuing paragraphs aim to “set the scene” for the conception of home that operates throughout Ibsen’s prose oeuvre and therefore offer a cultural framework for the discussion in Chapter 1 while also facilitating it in the remaining two chapters.

In *The Fall of Public Man* (1977) Sennett charts the evolvement of the terms “public” and “private” from just before the French Revolution and into the twentieth century with examples from human activities in everyday life such as behaviour in taverns or attitudes to clothing. His main argument is that the growing importance of the category of psychology in the nineteenth century slowly eroded and impoverished the public sphere which subverts the prevailing critical account – one that the public sphere is considered to dominate and threaten the existence of the private sphere. Sennett traces the usage of the words “public” and “private” in English and French to three hundred years prior but suggests that the relationship between them, which we traditionally recognize as one of essential opposition, begins to develop at a time of great social, political and economic changes in Europe’s urban settings.

As the cities grew, and developed networks of sociability independent of direct royal control, places where strangers might regularly meet grew up. This was the era of the building of massive urban parks, [...] the era in which coffeehouses, then cafes and coaching inns, became social centres; in which the theater and opera houses became open to a wide public through the open sale of tickets rather than the older practice whereby aristocratic patrons distributed places. [In addition,] the cash economy expanded [and] investment became more rationalized, business was carried on in offices and shops and on increasingly impersonal basis.<sup>77</sup>

In the rapidly developing city environment people increasingly sought to ‘demarcate this life from the private domain of family and friends.’<sup>78</sup> Distinct articulated forms of public behaviour emerged with which the entity of the family was seen to be in conflict – ‘while man *made* himself in public, he *realized* himself in the private realm, above all in his

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<sup>77</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 17-18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

experiences with the family.’<sup>79</sup> The fall of the *ancien régime*<sup>80</sup> at the end of the eighteenth century gave way to capitalism while the role of religion in everyday bourgeois life got challenged by secular ways of thinking. According to Sennett, the unpredictable trends of the early capitalist economy exacerbated the public versus private divide. Those able to protect themselves from the negative financial impact gradually lost ‘the will to control and shape public order’<sup>81</sup> and began to retreat from it. The concept of the family thus became ‘idealized as life wherein order and authority were unchallenged, [...] a refuge from the terrors of society’<sup>82</sup> while public life started to be viewed as morally suspicious.

Secularism added to the erosion of traditional values. Writings of scientists and philosophers lessened the grip of the Christian ideal of transcendence, shaping instead the bourgeois urge for ‘immediate sensation, immediate fact, immediate feeling’<sup>83</sup>. This led to a growing preoccupation with subjective thoughts, the questioning of their validity as well as a curiosity, indeed, anxiety about the thoughts and feelings of others – about themselves and towards those around them. As Sennett concludes, these developments resulted in fundamental changes to public behaviour manifested in ‘psychological conditions’<sup>84</sup> which were predicated on an individual’s great concern as to how they might be perceived beyond the boundaries of the private realm and included such attitudes as ‘defence through withdrawal’<sup>85</sup> from the public as well as ‘silence’<sup>86</sup> whilst surrounded by strangers but also ‘involuntary disclosure of character’<sup>87</sup> in such settings. As I will show, some of these behavioural traits surface in the characters of Henrik Ibsen’s prose plays.

The question of the public versus private divide eases us into that discussion for it enables us to consider more closely the locus in which these characters exist – the interior. Like Sennett, so too Charles Rice, the author of *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture*,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> The *ancien régime* stands for the political and social system in France until 1789 when hereditary monarchy and the feudal system nobility were abolished by the French Revolution. See William Doyle, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 19.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

*Modernity, Domesticity* (2007), resorts to dictionary entries (in English and French) to trace when the word occurs in history and locates it as early as the fifteenth century. However, ‘it was only in the beginning of the nineteenth century’<sup>88</sup>, he notes, that the word comes to denote an inside space. Its uses in language extend to an artistic representation of the inside (as in a painting) and also, aptly for the purposes of this study, a theatre set. There is thus a double nature to the interior, one of ‘a physical, three-dimensional space, as well as an image, whether it be two-dimensional representation such as a painting [...] or a flat backdrop that could conjure up an interior as a theatrical scene.’<sup>89</sup> In this sense the interior also includes ‘a reverie or imaginal picture’<sup>90</sup> in which imagination ‘could transform the spatial interior into something other.’<sup>91</sup>

To elucidate the latter element, Rice offers an extract from the poem “The Twofold Room” (1862) by Charles Baudelaire in which the space the poet inhabits stimulates a kind of daydream that, however, gets interrupted, promptly returning him to reality where the room immediately appears in its recognizable, ordinary features. For Rice this exemplifies how the idea of the interior fused with

a domestic sense as a new topos of subjective interiority and framed newly articulated and increasingly widespread desires for privacy and comfort, for the consolidation of specific gendered roles and familial roles in life, for the linking of a consumer culture to the attainment of domestic arrangements that demonstrated acceptable norms, and for the practices of self-representation in the context of domestic life.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. (Note that theatrical scenery in the early nineteenth century was painted but it was increasingly being replaced by real stage objects as props from 1840s onwards. This is touched on in Chapter 1.)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

As Rice adds, the interior in this sense is ‘a bourgeois manifestation’<sup>93</sup> and this sociocultural characterization brings us back to Richard Sennett’s exploration of the public and private realms in which the bourgeoisie play a central role. It also brings us to Henrik Ibsen. Put differently: in the above, the scholars jointly paint for us (in a concise but instructive manner) the milieu of Ibsen’s dramatic worlds. Their definitions of the tropes of the public, the private and the interior provide the historical backdrop that is necessary to appreciate the position from which Ibsen operates (and also further elucidate the ideas explored in Mark B. Sandberg’s book *Ibsen’s Houses* discussed earlier). But the nineteenth century is not where the story of these crucial qualifiers of home ends for us and to show how they impact on the work of Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker, I want to return to another of Sennett’s points.

As covered above, Sennett holds the view that the rise of capitalism and secular belief in the nineteenth century were crucial to how the people conceived of the public and the private. A sense of dislocation from the public led them to seek ‘in the private realms of life, especially in the family, some principle of order’<sup>94</sup> and Sennett suggests that the legacy of this attitude in our own time is that ‘the past built a hidden desire for stability in the overt desire for closeness between human beings’<sup>95</sup> within a home. The private domestic space, according to Sennett, became invested with expectations of ‘security, rest and permanence’<sup>96</sup> thereby extolling the figure of intimacy to ‘a virtue’<sup>97</sup> of sorts. Focusing particularly on how this state of affairs affected people’s active political engagement and public agency at the time, Sennett raises questions that resonate with how public and private continue to be conceived of in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He wonders whether ‘the experience of intimacy’<sup>98</sup> in a kind of insularity of existence can sufficiently equip people to cope with the ‘harshness, constraints, and difficulties’ of the world beyond the domestic enclosure and whether building a perspective on life which is moulded solely on ‘the expectation of trust,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 259.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 259-260.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

of warmth, of comfort [can be] strong enough to move in a world founded on injustice'<sup>99</sup>. Sennett concludes that through 'contradictions inherited from the past [...] we remain imprisoned in the cultural terms of the nineteenth century'<sup>100</sup> and it is in the light of these reflections that – in the present moment – we can discern the obstinacy of the understanding of home that so preoccupied Ibsen in his prose plays and which, in modification, endures into the time of Bobby Baker and Mona Hatoum. It is not insignificant that Sennett pens these thoughts in the 1970s, the period during which the artistic visions of both female artists examined in this thesis were being shaped in educational settings by different social, economic and political currents and relations of power (I expand on this in the beginning of Chapters 2 and 3).

It remains for this section to briefly outline the concept of domesticity. When associated with the interior, domesticity should not be considered its historical companion. That is to say that interior in the sense of spatial enclosure is a feature of even the comparatively more rudimentary architectures of the distant past while domesticity, according to scholar Hilde Heynen, is

a construction of the nineteenth century [and] refers to a whole set of ideas that developed in relation to the division between work and home. These ideas stressed the growing separation between the male and female spheres, [...] men were considered fit to take their place in the public sphere of work and power, whereas women were relegated to the private realm [...] which they were assumed to turn into a place of rest and relaxation for their husbands, fathers, or brothers.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>101</sup> Hilde Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions" in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, eds. Hilde Heynen, Gulsum Baydar (New York: Routledge, 2005), 7. (Charles Rice refers to this publication in the accompanying notes to his book.)



The gendered conceptualization of domesticity throws up questions of political, economic as well as power relations and agency, pointing to the historical subordination of women in the home as providers of male comfort (the chapter on Bobby Baker will look at this more closely).<sup>102</sup> In this way the domestic is infused with a sentimental quality which can be linked with the “dreamy” interpretation of the interior as seen in the case of Baudelaire’s poem. It is clearly a male fantasy in which the woman is almost rendered invisible but for the trace of her labour, the object of which is meant to be the man’s comfort. But, as Rice points out, this understanding of the interior, as much as it is misconceived, is also allied to the spatial (material) interior, making the relationship between them ‘far from transparent.’<sup>103</sup> The very polemics occupies the third chapter of the thesis from the point of view of the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first and relates it to Ibsen to demonstrate the obstinacy of this ideology.

### **Performativity of Home**

The artists considered here treat home as a multi-scalar concept which means that although they share the domestic space as the point of departure for their work, they bring into their explorations other (socio-)geographical units through which home can be conceived. In addition to this cross-calibrated plurality, manifold meanings of home also exist within a discrete scale – for example, the domestic is closely associated yet not always synonymous with terms like house or family. Home manifests itself in an infinite number of ways which highlights the dilemma of its definition. A useful reflection of its multiplicity for our discussion is language. When visiting with someone, we are often told that we should *make ourselves at home*. A significant experience *brings home* a realisation. Returning from a long, tiring journey, we recall the old adage *home sweet home*. To be the *home side* in a sports event instils a sense of pride and heightened responsibility to do better than the

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<sup>102</sup> See Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).

<sup>103</sup> Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2.

opponent. Knowledge of a certain topic makes us *at home* in discussing it with peers. Crossing the UK border, you are unlikely to miss the signs saying “*Home Office*.” A town that cherishes its history or is a birthplace of a prominent figure might label itself *the home of* that particular tradition or person. Restaurant menus offer *home-made* soups or pies, promising a unique gustatory experience. On the world-wide-web, we roam from one *homepage* to another, forming part of a globalised community.

The list of similar examples could continue. In all of them the word “home” serves an abundance of purposes and situations. It plays many roles. It *performs*. The idea that words perform originated in the work of the British philosopher of language J. L. Austin in the 1950s. Austin’s argument does not concern itself with sentences such as the above but draws attention to a particular type of utterance in everyday language which, he feels, grammarians and philosophers have failed to examine and categorise. He gives the example of the sentence ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’<sup>104</sup> and calls it a ‘performative’<sup>105</sup> utterance proposing that it ‘indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something.’<sup>106</sup> Introducing into linguistics the aspects of performance and action, Austin stresses that when we formulate such sentences what actually happens is that ‘*in* saying something we [also] do something’.<sup>107</sup>

Austin initially frames the performative in relation to the ‘constative’<sup>108</sup> which is an utterance that contains a statement, a report of a fact, for instance “the name of this ship is *Queen Elizabeth*.” In further defining the term, he is also mindful to warn that the circumstances in which an utterance appears play a determining role in whether it can be considered a performative. A communicational exchange can go wrong for a number of reasons: something may be said out of context, someone may be deliberately misleading their interlocutor, or there may simply be a misunderstanding. To eliminate scenarios like

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<sup>104</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

these from his theory, Austin brands such usage of language ‘parasitic’<sup>109</sup> and the resulting (non-performative) utterances as ‘infelicities.’<sup>110</sup> This leads him to seek ‘pure’<sup>111</sup> performatives in linguistic conditions governed by the kind of communicational conventions in which the felicitous-ness of an utterance would not come into question.

Deconstructing Austin’s theory, philosopher Jacques Derrida pointed to a perceived limitation and suggested that in explicitly discounting and eliminating from analyses certain locutionary situations and their inherent communicational motives – for example, utterances made on stage, evening after evening, in a play – Austin undermines the very existence of the notion he espouses:

is not what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, “non-serious”, *citation* [...] the determined modification of [...] general iterability – without which there would not even be a “successful” performative? So that – a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion – a successful performative is necessarily an “impure” performative.<sup>112</sup>

Derrida’s deconstruction of the concept’s seemingly narrowing range led American linguist John Searle, Austin’s former student, to launch a vigorous retort. According to scholar Ian’s Maclean, Searle reproached the French philosopher for the ‘perversion of truth [and] lack of clarity’<sup>113</sup>. The pair subsequently engaged in a lengthy correspondence which, among other, unearthed a wider ideological clash between the structuralist and post-structuralist schools of philosophy but as literary scholar James Loxley has noted it also enabled, in the decades following its inception, performativity to grow into a concept ‘detachable from the circumstances of its formulation [...] and usefully applicable to a wide

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>112</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Webber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>113</sup> Ian Maclean, “Un dialogue de sourds: Some Implications of the Austin-Searle-Derrida Debate” in *Jacques Derrida: Critical Thought*, ed. Ian Maclachlan (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004), 59.

range of differing intellectual challenges or problems.’<sup>114</sup> A closer examination of two influential re-workings will benefit our discussion – those by philosophers Judith Butler and Jean-François Lyotard.

Drawing on the (dis)continuities between Austin and Derrida, Judith Butler, whose contribution to the fields of philosophy and contemporary theory has seen her described by scholar Vicky Kirby as ‘one of the most prolific and influential writers in the academy today’<sup>115</sup>, applied the term “performative” to questions of identity. The social category of gender, she argues, ‘is a performative accomplishment [and] in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted *through a stylised repetition of acts*.’<sup>116</sup> For Butler, gender is performative in the sense that it is shaped by social factors and cultural circumstances, the regimes driven by the ‘defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality’<sup>117</sup> which govern the social matrix. Gender is not something that is routinely part of the subject. It is culturally produced and thus received which ‘create[s] the effect of the natural, the original, the inevitable.’<sup>118</sup>

For this reason, the understanding of gender as a pre-existing notion is an illusion, leading to the inference that gender is also performative because it is fictional. What sustains the illusion is repetitive action – a continuous reiteration of heterosexual norms. However, as Butler suggests, (evoking Derrida’s critique of Austin), the repetition of an act opens up the possibility of change and the emergence of agency and with this the potential for the subversion or destabilisation of the regimes of power. For Butler, therefore, performativity is the deplorable consequence of the historical inability to suppress the structural inequalities between men and women and the notion of gender, the humanity’s fundamental organising principle, has been built on this disequilibrium. To right this wrong one must exercise critical thinking and find ways to fight back.

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<sup>114</sup> James Loxley, *Performativity* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.

<sup>115</sup> Vicky Kirby, *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2006), vii.

<sup>116</sup> Judith Butler "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), 519.

<sup>117</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxxi.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

Although in somewhat different vein, the theme of resistance also runs through Lyotard's postulation of the term, which along with his other contributions, scholars Douglas M. Kellner and Steven Best note, is 'of fundamental importance for contemporary postmodern theory'<sup>119</sup>. For Lyotard, performativity is the criterion of 'the legitimization of knowledge'<sup>120</sup> in the age of postmodernity. The technological advancement of the late twentieth century, coupled with the ideology of capitalism, has created of knowledge a commodity, that is, an entity that above all else has an economic value. The significance of knowledge is measured by its profitability, its ability to optimise a system's efficiency. In other words, knowledge has been transformed into a product that is at the mercy of the volatility of the markets. This is not to say that new knowledge in the shape of scholarly research should be independent of capital streams – this can hardly be avoided – but that when judged on the performative criterion, knowledge is ultimately devalued and stifled.

The fundamental purpose of knowledge is to produce new ideas and these may require time to develop and get copiously articulated, something the criterion of performativity is unlikely to allow. To counter this capitalist-driven dynamic, Lyotard introduces the concept of 'paralogy'<sup>121</sup> which is a creative way to disrupt the dominant ways of thinking. It is through imaginative interventions into existing theories that new knowledge can emerge most fruitfully and offer some resistance. Although paralogy might constitute ardent opposition, it would seem destined to serve as the domain of the few against the commodified multitude, thus unable to challenge the supremacy it wants to overturn. Nevertheless, not giving in to the imposing paradigm, even if it means operating on the margins, keeps the prospect of reversal alive.

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<sup>119</sup> Douglas M. Kellner and Steven Best "Lyotard and Postmodern Gaming" in *Jean François Lyotard: Critical Evaluations and Cultural Theory, Volume Two, Politics and History of Philosophy*, eds. Victor E. Taylor and Gregg Lambert (London: Routledge, 2006), 247.

<sup>120</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 43.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

The burgeoning discussion on performativity in the wake of Austin's legacy<sup>122</sup> reveals a discursive elasticity, creative re-framings comprising digressions from as well as compatibilities with the source text. In contrast to Austin, Butler and Lyotard attach to their respective definitions of the term a negative connotation, designating it as undesirable and detrimental. To tackle the adverse impact, they call for repetitive acts of and above all, an analytical approach to resistance – as we will see, these two characteristics are integral to our discussion on home. What is inherent to the profusion of the interpretations of performativity, however, is captured incisively in the very title of Austin's influential work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962): the emphasis on *doing* suggests that language has a constituting function not only a mediating one, that it does not 'simply reflect a world [...] but has the power to *make* a world'<sup>123</sup> as theatre scholar Shannon Jackson has summed it up. As performativity ventures beyond the confines of linguistics, it retains this dynamic base and, according to the authors of a study of the trope in German cultural studies, 'challenges established epistemological securities'<sup>124</sup> of the structures of society by interrogating 'the practices and processes that create and validate these structures in the first place.'<sup>125</sup> Performativity, then, consists of active re-visioning of an existing reality.

Returning to the earlier cluster of examples containing the word "home", it is safe to conclude that they do not conform to Austin's concept of the performative. Their distinct enunciative potential fails to convey the required sense of action. Nevertheless, there *is* a form of doing immanently present here and necessitates some deliberation. It is exhibited by way of the multivalence of "home", the disparate applications of the word in the above formulations. "Home", in several grammatical guises, represents a sort of coagulating factor that holds the individual utterances together.

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<sup>122</sup> In addition to Austin, Butler, Lyotard, Derrida and Searle, Loxley's book (referenced above) also examines the writings on performativity by Stanley Cavell, Paul De Man and Stanley Fish.

<sup>123</sup> Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>124</sup> Carolin Duttinger, Lucia Ruprecht, Introduction to *Performance and Performativity in German Cultural Studies*, eds. Carolin Duttinger, Lucia Ruprecht, Andrew Webber (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2003), 9.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

The sentences above act collectively in the manner reminiscent of what Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin termed ‘metalinguistics’<sup>126</sup> – a modality that, like linguistics, explores ‘the same, concrete, extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon, the word, [and does so] from various sides and various points of view.’<sup>127</sup> Metalinguistics captures what linguistics is unable to in conditions of speech communication: ‘from the perspective of discursive performance’<sup>128</sup>, as literary scholar Michael Eskin in his analysis of Bakhtin notes, metalinguistics studies the relations between utterances ‘as manifestations and enactments of co-existence.’<sup>129</sup> In other words, through pervasive use of ‘home’ in everyday speech the above formulations coexist, that is, they become part of a communicational situation in which the exchange of utterances between people creates a relation that amounts to the metalinguistic sum of the individual components. In this process “home” separates from the lexical environs inhabited thus far, transcends syntactical boundaries, and turns into an autonomous trope (in no more need of quotation marks), instantiating a culturally recognisable meaning. Completing the journey from syntax to pragmatics via semantics, home is weaved into the fabric of collective awareness.

The transition from utterance to notion by way of Bakhtin’s extralinguistic methodology furnishes home with unique social significance the foundation of which stems from the frequency of the lexeme’s occurrence. The multivalence of ‘home’ in language reflects its omnipresence as a fully-fledged human conception but also complicates its definition. How does one circumscribe such an infinitely complex, motile and agonal term? How does one reconcile such disparities as “home sweet home” and “Home Office”? I suggest that the answer to these questions lies in the distillation of Austin’s, Butler’s and finally Lyotard’s accounts of performativity or, more precisely, in yet another (*ex*)appropriation of the concept. In considering home as a product of social reality capable

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<sup>126</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 181.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Michael Eskin, *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel’shtam, and Celan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

of agency (through repetition and critical thought) and carrying the dynamic potential for the transformation of social structures, I propose that home formulates a performative in its own right.

### **Home: a Performative Expression**

Our initial departure from Austin's theory saw essentially non-performative utterances acquire a performative prominence through collective metalinguistic meaning. It follows from this that the exceeding of linguistics throws into uncertainty the appropriateness of the term "utterance" in the view of the widening of the discursive field. It will be more fitting, therefore, to posit that home formulates a performative *expression*, grounding this lexical adjustment in the distinction between the root verbs utter, 'make (a sound) with one's voice',<sup>130</sup> and express, 'convey (a thought or feeling) in words or by gestures and conduct'<sup>131</sup> – the latter denoting a more complex and extensive action.

In scholarly pursuits, the term "expression" has occupied artists, scientists and philosophers alike. As early as the fifteenth century, Renaissance sculptors and painters studied carefully the power of expression in relation to the visual depiction of human emotions, often resorting to close observation of people's corporeal and facial movements in everyday life. The explorations continued well into the seventeenth century, supported also by the more analytical work of art theorists, while in the eighteenth century they attracted the interest of physiognomists and scholars of anatomy. Drawing on the work of these scientists a century later, the naturalist Charles Darwin, a crucial contributor to the science of human evolution, speculated on the origin of the expressions of emotion and proposed that they are 'innate or inherited',<sup>132</sup> that is, that they have come about as part of the process of human evolution.

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<sup>130</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "utter", accessed 22 October, 2016, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

<sup>131</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "express", accessed 22 October, 2016, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

<sup>132</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animal* (London: Julian Friedman Publishers, 1979), 351.



In the twentieth century, French philosopher Henri Bergson, described as ‘an interdisciplinary thinker *avant la lettre*’<sup>133</sup> by scholar Suzanne Guerlac, studied expression as the relationship between emotion and representation. There exist, according to Bergson, two kinds of emotion, one ‘is the consequence of an idea [...] the result of an intellectual state,’<sup>134</sup> for instance, a memory of a tragic event which elicits sadness, and is indicative of a cognitive process. The other type is the ‘creative’<sup>135</sup> emotion where, in contrast, it is the emotion that gives rise to representation. He illustrates this with the example of a musician for whom the emotion drives the making of a composition – such a creative emotion ‘is pregnant with representations.’<sup>136</sup> Although a musical arrangement emerges from a particular emotion, the representation of it is not merely a transmission of that same emotion. Rather, ‘each musical composition brings with it new feelings which are created by that music, are defined and delimited by the very line, unique in its kind, of the melody or symphony.’<sup>137</sup> The resulting sentiment does not necessarily constitute an autonomous, new feeling but rather a shading of the (composer’s) original emotion, a *renewed*, nuanced affectivity.

In his treatise on the theories of emotion, psychologist James Hillman attributes great importance to Bergson’s work and writes that the creative emotions ‘are manifestations of [the concept of] *élan vital*,’<sup>138</sup> the vital impulse, Bergson’s philosophical contribution to Darwin’s theory of evolution. *Élan vital* accompanies the development of all living organisms and is, in the words of literary scholar Mary Ann Gillies who has examined his influence in the writings of modernists like T. S. Eliot, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, the ‘central force that exists at the heart of things and that directs the flow of life.’<sup>139</sup> For Bergson, the vital impulse is ‘the fundamental cause of [evolutional] variations [...] that

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<sup>133</sup> Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), x.

<sup>134</sup> Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, transl. R. Ashley Avdra and Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 43.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>138</sup> James Hillman, *Emotion: A Comprehensive Phenomenology of Theories and Their Meanings for Therapy* (London: Routledge, 1960), 226.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 13.

accumulate and create new species'<sup>140</sup> and establishes the prime exponent of the philosopher's enduring stance that spirituality is a key component of philosophy, or rather, that 'philosophy introduces us into the spiritual life.'<sup>141</sup> Therefore, in Bergson's theory all expression of human emotion emanates from a dominating yet also unidentified (and potentially divine) force.

This idea can be read alongside the work of seventeenth-century rationalist philosopher Baruch Spinoza who employed the term "expression" with regard to questions of theology and ontology. In his expansive treatise *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza opposes the then dominant idea that God exists outside the universe arguing instead that God is 'an absolutely infinite being [...] a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.'<sup>142</sup> God is the natural world, the nature that surrounds us, and everything that happens in nature is an expression of God. Human beings too are considered modes of God – or as historian Julian Bourg has summarized it in a twentieth-century reassessment of ethics (a field to which Spinoza's work provides an important historical contribution) linked to the civil unrest in France in 1968, God 'unfolds in the various modes that comprise and express it.'<sup>143</sup>

A detailed analysis of the philosophies of Bergson and Spinoza exceeds the scope of this study but as we postulate the existence of the performative expressions of home we should note the basic principle that enables the emergence of expression in both theorists' work. With Bergson as with Spinoza, expression is that which emanates from a higher authority, a sort of originator, a superordinate from which everything cascades down. Putting aside the speculative religious overtones in the two ideas, a conceptual leap from philosophy to linguistics – where we began the performative inquiry – allows us to draw a crude but arguably feasible parallel. In the structure of Bergson's and Spinoza's critical thoughts, *élan vital* and God can be said to constitute the hypernoms of their individual discursive systems.

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<sup>140</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 87.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>142</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *On the Improvement of the Understanding, Ethics, Correspondence*, transl. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 51.

<sup>143</sup> Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 150.

That is to say both terms formulate the all-encompassing categories that the infinite modes they themselves initiate or their own expressions, fall within as subdivisions.

Staying with linguistic terminology and returning once more to the numerous ways in which we can conceive of the word home leads to a similar conclusion, namely, that home serves as a hypernym for a range of verbalisations and that, by extension, this applies equally to the metalinguistic trope of home. Its attributes in a social reality *express* its complex and wide-ranging definition which includes the ability of transformation of social structures and ways of thinking. The expressions of home, like those in the respective taxonomies of Renaissance painters, Bergson and Spinoza enable the passage of the immaterial into the material, of a palpable manifestation arising from intangible matter. Thinking back to the domestic scale, we turn to contemporary Dutch cultural anthropologist Irene Cieraad who proposes that it

derives its meaning [from] the practices performed on it and in it [which] may be related to its material structure, like decorating, renovating and moving house, or to activities like cooking, cleaning [...] or gardening, or to psychological and narrated practices of remembering and dreaming.<sup>144</sup>

If we consider the domestic as a hypernym then actions like decorating, renovating, cooking and cleaning are its subdivisions as well as its founding acts. Their transformative potential can be seen in the sense of progression they signify: the “material structure” serves as a prerequisite for “activities” to take place, the structure provides the locus for a range of physical actions which, in turn, generate affective responses or what Cieraad calls the “psychological”. The expression of home as domestic space, therefore, may be conceived as a set of continuous and dependant developments which start in the concrete and end in the abstract. Crucially though, evoking Butler’s performative constitution of gender, the process

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<sup>144</sup> Irene Cieraad, Introduction to *At Home, An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 11.

is maintained through the *repetition* of these formative acts, a perpetual renewal that is both material and sentient. In other words, the preserving of (the idea of) home resides in the unceasing nurturing of familiar content by means of particular expressions.

Another such hypernym that this thesis encounters, particularly in the second chapter, is that of the nation-state. Political anthropologist Ted C. Lewellen suggests that ‘the legitimacy of the nation-state is dependent on maintaining control of ideology and action within clearly defined physical borders.’<sup>145</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the (political) effectiveness of repetition as a tool for sustaining the nation-state ideology. Singing the national anthem at public celebrations, voting in the national elections, cheering on the nation’s athletes in the Olympics or even, more prosaically, preparing the “national” dish – are these not cyclical, repetitive ideological extensions that preserve the idea of the nation-state, performative expressions which acquire full meaning through perpetual execution?

In Butler’s work repetition signals the opportunity to cause imbalance to the hegemonic state of affairs. The notion of home appears to be exposed to similar pressures which, however, it handles in a different way. Namely, if gender is acted *upon* by the oppressiveness of the regimes of power, home operates on both sides of that divide: it, like gender, absorbs the permeation of the governing discursive institutions but it also actively negotiates the directionality of those forces, moderates their effects and re-configures them to preserve its solidity as a notion in social reality. For home, this is, in a way, a case of fighting its corner: firmly retaining the core of its conceptual range but remaining available to external discursive fluctuation provided that it does not conflict with its fundamental nature. This sort of resistance is reminiscent of Lyotard’s idea of performativity. Lamenting the detrimental impact on the traditional value of knowledge, he proposes to counter the pervasive capitalist logic by means of defiance that is para-logical and seeks inventive ways to oppose. The quintessence of Lyotard’s strategy lies in the appeal for a critical appraisal of the social moment and for an impending reaction to the threat of submissive conformity to the coercing governing structures.

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<sup>145</sup> Ted C. Lewellen, *Political Anthropology, an Introduction* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 220.

To again use the domestic expression of home as an example, resistance is inherent to it by means of the ongoing separation of the private and the public. This division is part of a historical process through which the entity of the household became the locus of conscious seclusion or withdrawal from the outside world. The boundary, although tacitly constituted in architectural terms, is not fixed and is perpetually negotiated – for instance, the technological advancement of recent decades has enabled the element of the public to exercise new ways of entering the private thus re-shaping the texture of domestic life in material as well as emotional aspects. The resistance of domestic space is demonstrated in its ability to absorb such “pressures” and integrate them within its structures while still retaining a line of demarcation – as Cieraad claims, despite such incursions, the domestic space ‘is still a focal point of most people’s lives [...] and more than ever a core symbol in Western Culture.’<sup>146</sup>

The Lyotardian idea of resistance can also be applied to the nation-state as an expression of home on a different scale to (that is, a geographical amplification of) the domestic. The poles of the private and the public that are characteristic of the domestic here get recast as homeland and foreign land, the distinction between them being the actual physical and political border between sovereign territories. Resistance is embodied, as alluded to above, in the apparatus of the armed forces as well as government policies and strategies which protect the nation-state’s unity and security. These “formal” performative aspects of the nation-state are complemented by its expressions of home in everyday life, both strands working in unison to retain its structures.

The examples above complete the lengthy discussion of the performativity of home, the first key theoretical framework of this thesis. I have argued that the performativity of home is a multi-scalar concept which the ensuing chapters on Henrik Ibsen, Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker will demonstrate further. The chapters will also establish the performativity of home as the vehicle or facilitator of the figurative transportations of home

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<sup>146</sup> Irene Cieraad, Introduction to *At Home, An Anthropology of Domestic Space*, ed. Irene Cieraad (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 11.

in the works of the three artists. A discussion of this second key framework of the study follows in the next section.

### **Figurative Transportation: Thinking toward Home**

Martin Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" argues that art holds the capacity to open new ways of understanding ourselves and the world that surrounds us. 'The artwork,' he writes, 'is a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is'<sup>147</sup> and, whatever the substance of this "other," it reveals what he calls 'truth'<sup>148</sup>, defining it as 'the unconcealment of [human] beings,'<sup>149</sup> the disclosing of their essential nature. The truth thus laid bare, 'transport[s] us out of the realm of the ordinary'<sup>150</sup> and imposes 'displacement [onto our] accustomed ties to [the] world [and] all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking.'<sup>151</sup> That is to say, art figuratively takes us elsewhere and in doing so disrupts the foundations of our cognition.

I read the works of art gathered in this study as transportive experiences that go beyond the "ordinary" moment(s) as we, members of the audience, engage with them. These works prompt a spectatorial dispossession, a temporary separation of ties with the material immediacy of our surroundings and call for – I argue – a reflection on home. Heidegger does not appear to elaborate on how this reflective process unfolds but a compelling way to conceive of this is proposed in a later lecture entitled "Building Dwelling Thinking" which takes up the question of dwelling, according to the philosopher, the fundamental principle of humankind. He writes, '[t]he way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is [...] dwelling'<sup>152</sup>. Our dwelling is accomplished in a number of

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<sup>147</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, transl. Albert Hofstadter (London: Routledge, 2010), 91.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 147.

derivative ways – innumerable activities that belong under its heading, building in the sense of ‘raising up of edifices’<sup>153</sup> as well as thinking being two of them.

To expand on the premise, Heidegger offers the example of a bridge and proposes that in connecting two shores it constitutes a ‘location’<sup>154</sup>, providing a useful point of orientation that contributes to how people make sense of their environs. The bridge assists in shaping a region into a system of localities. What connects these into a network, that is, fills the distances between them is what he refers to as ‘space’<sup>155</sup>. The traditional way of determining how near or far we are to a location is through mathematical operations and the measuring of dimensions such as length, height or depth. These relations Heidegger calls ‘*spatium*’,<sup>156</sup> but he warns that representing space ‘purely as *spatium*’<sup>157</sup> relegates the bridge to ‘a mere something at some position which can be occupied at any time by something else’<sup>158</sup>, diminishing its distinctiveness.

He thus argues for a parallel concept of ‘*extensio* [or] pure extension.’<sup>159</sup> If *spatium* opens the possibility of calculating and arithmetic, *extensio* rejects the conception of ‘numerical magnitudes [as] the *ground* of the nature of space and locations.’<sup>160</sup> In other words, while our understanding of distance is rooted in what can be measured, we should also consider qualitative attributes of space which are not predicated on what is quantifiable but on experiential sensibilities. Our receptive faculties discern distances on an intuitive level and the question of how near or remote something is becomes part of our affective relation to that thing for the process of perceiving this distance is inherent to our dwelling, our being:

when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach,  
we are staying with the things themselves. [...] If all of us now think, from

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 155-56.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 156.

where we are right here, of the old bridge in Heidelberg, *this thinking toward that location is not a mere experience inside the persons present here; rather, it belongs to the nature of our thinking of that bridge that in itself thinking gets through, persists through, the distance to that location.* From this spot right here, we are there at the bridge [...] From right here we may even be much nearer to that bridge [...] than someone who uses it daily as an indifferent river crossing. [...] To say that [humans] are is to say that in dwelling they persist through spaces, [in other words] we always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them.<sup>161</sup> (My emphasis.)

The “thinking toward” described in this passage allows us to develop a more nuanced appreciation for how the figurative transportation home through the medium of art might evolve. As an expressly phenomenological appearance, the journey takes hold of a spectator’s intellectual as well as intuitive capacities. Common to the works examined in this thesis is that they initiate a transportive experience, the conduit being the performative expressions of home. Home, or rather, contemplation on home, is simultaneously also the transportive journey’s destination. That is to say, in absorbing the treatment of home in the work of Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker, we are invited to revisit our own perceptions and feelings about habitation and open ourselves to the possibility of new and different perspectives, a transformation of sorts. The chapters that follow identify the figurative transportations of home through a dramaturgical analysis of the performativities of home which takes into consideration the historical, aesthetic as well as political perspectives of the examined works.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 156-57.



## **The Studied Artists: Modern(ism), Postmodern(ism)**

It will have become apparent through the course of the Introduction that, despite their shared interest in home, this thesis brings together three quite disparate artists in terms of art period and also art form. The present section works through these disparities to qualify some of the fundamental terminology employed in the chapters so as to aid the discussions that follow. Two words I use frequently in reference to Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker are the adjectives “modern” and “postmodern”, with the former typically ascribed to the dramatist and the latter attributed to the installationist and the performance artist respectively. To get closer to their meanings, I want to first expand on the cognate nouns – “modernism” and “postmodernism” but also “modernity and postmodernity”. In doing so, I primarily rely on the work by scholars Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, Peter Brooker and Peter V. Zima who have, in different ways, offered critical overviews of this “nomenclature”.

A cursory glance at the authors’ studies is enough to realize that there is an overwhelming abundance of scholarly accounts and efforts at the definition of these terms in the literature and that the volume far exceeds the scope of this thesis. What follows here is thus a necessarily brief precis that relates to the main subjects of investigation – Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker. In *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature* (2010), Peter V. Zima usefully sums up this contested discursive field as he aims to define postmodernity by juxtaposing the different uses of the term in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy only to observe that certain schools within them doubt that postmodernity could even exist as a veritable notion. He thus resolves to delineate postmodernity ‘in correlation to and in contrast with modernity’<sup>162</sup> and concedes at the outset that the most productive approach in attempting to understand both is to follow Brian McHale’s proposition that because postmodernism ‘does not possess attributes about which we can all agree’<sup>163</sup> and is unable to

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<sup>162</sup> Peter. V Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2010), 3, ProQuest Ebrary.

<sup>163</sup> Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1.

constitute ‘some kind of identifiable object’<sup>164</sup>, it should be considered a human ‘construction’.<sup>165</sup>

As Zima writes, this thinking ‘also applies to the concepts of “modernity” and “postmodernity”, whose semantic content not only depends on chance and individual idiosyncrasies but also on ideological engagement.’<sup>166</sup> According to Zima, another factor in the definitional attempts is that of the apparent need to establish a chronological order where the prefix “post” obviously indicates the successor ‘which follows modernity and departs from [it], in spite of all continuities that may still exist.’<sup>167</sup> Once the temporal component enters the discussion, what adds to the confusion over definitions is ‘the difference between epoch (period) and ideology, because in the debates concerning modernity and postmodernity, it is often unclear whether our interlocutors refer to ideologies as systems of values or to historical periods’<sup>168</sup>. This leads to deceptive employment of the terms either as metonymies or by creating a degree of reductionism that (wrongly) suggest homogeneity between them. Matters get more complicated still, Zima continues, if debates in ‘literary modernity or modernism’<sup>169</sup>, with their sizable array of aesthetic approaches and movements, are added to the search for definitions. Here the question of the time frames becomes especially contested as opinions tend to be formed ‘predominantly or exclusively on a stylistic level, [which makes them] particularly vulnerable to criticism’<sup>170</sup> – the case of Henrik Ibsen, as we will see shortly, being one such example.

The survey of this challenging scholarly terrain in pursuit of reliable or at least satisfactory explanations of modernity and postmodernity and their derivatives leads Zima to conclude that these terms should not be understood ‘purely as time periods, as ideologies or stylistic systems but as *problematics*: as *compounds of problems*.’<sup>171</sup> In this discursive

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Peter. V Zima, *Modern/Postmodern: Society, Philosophy, Literature* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2010), 3, ProQuest Ebrary.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 5.

arrangement the above three components commingle and interweave but can also stand independently. Or as Zima elucidates further:

[m]odernity and postmodernity, modernism and postmodernism can hardly be understood as ideologies, philosophies, rival aesthetics or stylistics. To the observer who has a sense of complexity, they appear as *problematics*: as *social and linguistic situations* within which conflicting answers to certain questions or incompatible solutions to certain problems are proposed. *The homogeneity of the problematic consists in the affinity of its problems and questions, its heterogeneity in its divergent answers and solutions.*<sup>172</sup>

Drawing on the works of scholarly figures such as Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Zygmunt Bauman, Friedrich Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell, Zima extracts the following explanations of the terms which will provide a useful reference for the entirety of the thesis – he notes that modernity ‘is frequently identified by philosophers and sociologists with the age of reason, i.e. with the period stretching almost three centuries (from 1600 to 1850)’<sup>173</sup> while modernism can be synonymised with ‘*late modernity*’<sup>174</sup>, and signifies ‘a new era around 1850 [marked by] a changing conception of history brought about by a crisis of the nineteenth century.’<sup>175</sup> To quote from Zima more fully, [t]his change of consciousness could be considered as *late modern* or *modernist*. It enables us to relate the concepts of *modernity* and *modernism* to one another: [...] *modernism or late modernity could be defined as an auto-criticism of modernity, of the spirit of modern times.*<sup>176</sup> Postmodernity, however, ‘can be constructed both as an innovative continuation of modernity as well as a break with the latter’<sup>177</sup> and has its beginnings ‘after the second World War, roughly in 1950.’<sup>178</sup> In his

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 14.

study of the terms, British philosopher Peter Brooker articulates the relationship between the “-isms” along similar lines. Though he initially appears to favour the view that postmodernism presents a turn away from modernism as it is ‘first of all a name for the series of social and provoking the definition of modernism’<sup>179</sup>, he later expands his idea, stating that ‘there are postmodernisms as well as modernisms [and] between them there is the dialogic traffic of collage and argument, the building and unbuilding of orthodoxies.’<sup>180</sup>

To locate Henrik Ibsen, Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker within this discourse, it may be useful to start from literary scholars Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, editors of the influential and comprehensive volume *Modernism 1890-1930* (1976). Their research of this period throws up similar difficulties of the definition of time frame and the scope of the term that we encountered in Zima’s study. They settle, however, on the following explanation in terms of ideology and style:

Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis – in which myth, structure and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture; it often involves an unhappy view of history – so that the Modernist writer is not simply the artist set free, but the artist under specific, apparently historical strain.<sup>181</sup>

With regard to the time frame and the place(s) of modernism, Bradbury and McFarlane write that the movements which anticipated its full blossoming, were ‘coming in increasing waves right through the nineteenth century’<sup>182</sup> and that this activity was international with a ‘focus of many varied forces which reached their peak in various

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<sup>179</sup> Peter Brooker, Introduction to *Modernism/Postmodernism*, ed. Peter Brooker (London: Longman, 1992), 3.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>181</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, “The Name and Nature of Modernism” in *Modernism 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 26.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 30.

countries at various times. In some it seemed to stay for a long period; in others, to function as a temporary disturbance and then go away again.<sup>183</sup> They conclude nevertheless that the year 1880 can be taken as the point when ideas of the Enlightenment combined the sensibility of the Romantics ‘to stimulate the work of the first generation of truly modern writers’<sup>184</sup> and they also note that the main geographical centre of modernism is most commonly traced along the ‘New York-London-Paris axis’<sup>185</sup> which, however, is typically associated ‘with the first quarter of the twentieth century, within which there are two peaks: the years immediately preceding and [...] immediately following the First World War.’<sup>186</sup> The authors thus warn that the international character of the movement was more widespread and highlight in particular the strand of ‘Germanic Modernism’ which includes the artistic scene in cities like Berlin, Vienna, Copenhagen but also smaller ones like ‘Munich and Darmstadt’.<sup>187</sup> As they emphasise, in

Scandinavia, in Germany, and to a substantial extent in Austria, it was the [nineteen] eighties, nineties and the early 1900s that witnessed a debate about the nature and name of Modernism of quite unparalleled passion and vehemence – years with, for the Germanic north, a much higher degree of self-consciousness, of articulateness, of documentation than perhaps any other part of Europe.<sup>188</sup>

According to Bradbury and McFarlane, Henrik Ibsen was for the internationally-renowned Danish critic Georg Brandes synonymous with what was considered modern in art or, as Bradbury and McFarlane assert, Ibsen’s naturalism was crucial to ‘Brandes’ elaboration of the concept of the Modern Breakthrough’<sup>189</sup> which, for him, also included

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 43.

figures such as the French novelist Gustave Flaubert and the British philosopher John Stuart Mill.<sup>190</sup> Yet Bradbury and McFarlane also point out that the pace of the period's artistic innovation in the shape of new styles and approaches was such that Brandes' writings on the 'Ibsen vogue'<sup>191</sup> were quickly supplanted by the critic's shift to the 'Strindberg vogue'<sup>192</sup> which brought into focus a different (new) set of artistic tendencies within only a matter of months. This momentum led to what Bradbury and McFarlane call 'the fortunes or realism and naturalism'<sup>193</sup> by which they are referring to the literary disputes of the late nineteenth century over whether the terminology of modern/modernist can at all be applied to the two 'movements'<sup>194</sup>. As the scholars report, the debate emerged out of the increasing belief that modernism was the opposite of naturalism, that it signified 'the breaking up of the naturalistic surface and its spirit of positivism [and that modernism was about] a fascination with irrational and unconscious forces.'<sup>195</sup>

While Bradbury and McFarlane propose that the relationship between naturalism and modernism should be viewed as 'one *growing out of the other*'<sup>196</sup>, Toril Moi perceives suggestions that 'Ibsen's place in [theatre] history'<sup>197</sup> should not be associated with the modernist aesthetic as a misperception of his work. She mounts a persuasive defence of the playwright as a modernist, maintaining that (particularly twentieth-century) interpretations of his work which rest on the premise that there exists 'an opposition between realism and modernism [are] fundamentally flawed.'<sup>198</sup> What is more, the 'denunciations of realism'<sup>199</sup> as 'intrinsically reactionary'<sup>200</sup> are 'singularly unhelpful with it comes to accounting for

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

Ibsen's radical impact in so many different societies'<sup>201</sup> and Moi notes several influential twentieth-century productions from around the world in support of her point.

Ibsen's 'first fully modernist play'<sup>202</sup> according to Moi, is *A Doll's House* – the work with which my discussion of the dramatist's examination of home in Chapter 1 begins. She lists a number of key elements in the writing that, in her view, make Ibsen a modernist from that point on: 'there is a turn to realism and prose, idealism is ironized or shown to be destructive [I touch on this in Chapter 1], skepticism is a central theme, the everyday is represented as a possible alternative to skepticism, theatre as an art form is embraced and acknowledged, [...] the situation of women is seen as the key social question of modernity [and] marriage is a central theme.'<sup>203</sup> *A Doll's House* has further been, in the words of American scholar Amy Holzapfel, 'canonized by theatre scholars and historians as the "birth" of realism'<sup>204</sup>, the method of staging focused on the portrayal of contemporary subjects within a recognizable social context. With the theoretical basis in the naturalistic approach of explaining human behaviour through scientific analysis, realism was crucial to the solidification of the genre of modern drama. One measure of the author's paradigmatic influence has been the longevity of the domestic as the genre's main setting, as the aforementioned works by Una Chaudhuri and Nicholas Grene discuss, and, by extension, the fortitude of realism (and naturalism) as still 'the dominant mode of staging, [the] conventions [of which] are accepted as norms'<sup>205</sup> – to quote from Christopher Innes' *A Sourcebook of Naturalist Theatre* (2000).

However, the century and more that has passed since the play opened has also been one of significant transformation for the theatre. While productions of Ibsen's works recreating the nineteenth-century Norwegian households much like those mounted by his contemporaries, the French director André Antoine or the Meningen Company from Germany, continue to draw spectators, they sit alongside forms of theatre that explore the

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>204</sup> Amy Holzapfel, *Art, Vision, and Nineteenth-Century Realist Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 19.

<sup>205</sup> Christopher Innes ed., *A Sourcebook of Naturalist Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 16.

home without relying on the use of text or the traditional stage space, conceptions of performance that reconfigure the role of the audience and are predicated on the blending of artistic media through technological capabilities. As the eminent scholar Richard Schechner, founder of the influential experimental theatre collective The Performance Group, memorably proposed in the early 1990s, ‘theatre as we have known and practiced it – the staging of written dramas – will be the string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre, a subdivision of performance.’<sup>206</sup> According to Schechner, performance has much broader scope. As a theory, it is ‘an overarching category comprising social, political, medical, economical, military, entertainment, and artistic events’<sup>207</sup> while its practices include, among other, ‘solo work, site-specific work, installation, and audience participation’<sup>208</sup> – all forms which resonate with the artistic provenances of Baker and Hatoum.

The proliferation of the eclectic, decidedly postmodern forms of performance – for which Schechner’s The Performance Group, formed in New York in 1967, was a leading force – sprang up from the historical avant-garde of the 1910s, 20s, and 30s and the interdisciplinary experiments and practices from the 1960s onwards.<sup>209</sup> As the aforementioned scholar Eleanor Skimin argues, these new performance currents often explicitly rejected the conventions of traditional realistic theatre of Ibsen’s age. She writes that ‘histories of the twentieth and twenty-first century performance have commonly excluded white bourgeois theatre as part of the genealogy of performance art, except to see it as the object of performance art’s parody or critique: against spectacle, against fakeness, against illusion, against the separation of spectator to performer, [...] against the bourgeois.’<sup>210</sup> As Skimin also notes, studies influential in charting the genealogies of

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<sup>206</sup> Richard Schechner, “No More Theatre PhDs” in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 57, Issue 3 (2013), 7.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> See Günter Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), Claire Warden, *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

<sup>210</sup> Eleanor Skimin, “Reproducing the White Bourgeois” in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 62, Issue 1 (2018), 80.



performance art have looked at earlier historical periods<sup>211</sup>, seemingly avoiding bourgeois theatre (that is, modern drama but also other forms like melodrama and the well-made play) on purpose.

Moi's definition of Ibsen as a modernist and Skimin's discussion of the relationship between dramatic theatre and performance art establish the key formal difference between Ibsen on one side and Hatoum and Baker on the other. He is a representative of the modern (but also modernist) aesthetic, they of the postmodern and this distinction is carefully articulated throughout Chapters 2 and 3. Ibsen's drama may be of a time deemed incompatible with postmodern art (as a more general term) but that does not preclude the possibility of looking for (and finding) conceptual spaces of alignment with artistic tendencies that followed. Pointing to these spaces is an important aim in Chapters 2 and 3. Although as postmodern artists Hatoum and Baker do not explicitly follow Ibsen's legacy the domestic serves as an exceptionally imaginative subject of their respective creative explorations and the critique of the (bourgeois) idea of home.

We should note at this point that for their many differences the artists have in common – aside from the interest in home – a strong connection to (or even a rootedness of sorts in) fine art. To be precise, Bobby Baker and Mona Hatoum studied fine art at London's prestigious Saint Martins School of Art (now Central St. Martins) and the Slade School of Fine Art respectively. For Ibsen fine art was something of a passion from an early age and, as Toril Moi writes, his 'wish to become a painter, his practice of painting, and his lifelong love of art is not just a curious fact about him but evidence that he placed himself right at the center of a living, productive aesthetic tradition in which painting and theatre were [viewed as] sister arts.'<sup>212</sup> With this description of a close-knit relationship Moi is referring to a period of intense creative exchanges between the two arts through the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth which preceded Ibsen but were nevertheless instrumental to his

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<sup>211</sup> Skimin mentions Marvin Carlson's *Performance: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996) which looks for connections between performance art in ancient Roman theatre and the Elizabethan period (among other).

<sup>212</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125.

development as a dramatist. This was a time in which ‘painters [frequently] painted scenes from plays’<sup>213</sup> while ‘playwrights would write plays based on paintings.’<sup>214</sup> It was also a ‘time of increasing demand for arresting visual spectacles when new kinds of performances and new kinds of visual technologies were being invented,’<sup>215</sup> including large paintings or panoramas as well as, to quote from Moi, ‘painted scenes on a big semi-transparent canvas, which, when suitably illuminated, gave the illusion of temporal change’<sup>216</sup> – also known as dioramas. According to Moi, panoramas and dioramas were very popular in the Norway of Ibsen’s youth and were often ‘painted in hyperrealist style’.<sup>217</sup> Also prevalent then (and known to Ibsen) were performance-based novelties such as ‘*attitudes* and *tableaux vivants*.’<sup>218</sup> The former, Moi notes, was a ‘dancelike performance’ by women in which they ‘would freeze into a series of imitations of classical sculptures [and thus were] allegorical and always alluding to famous works of art.’<sup>219</sup> Tableau vivant, however, was ‘the theatrical performance of a well-known painting with costumes, décor and as many participants as the painting required.’<sup>220</sup> It is (the fragments of) these and related elements that Moi’s study traces in Ibsen’s plays, leading her to attribute a ‘highly pictorial’<sup>221</sup> quality to his oeuvre – something my discussion also echoes, particularly in Chapters 1 and 2. However, my overall intention in this thesis is to show that like Ibsen’s plays, Hatoum’s installations and sculptures and Baker’s performance pieces both overtly and through subtle evocation draw spectators into the complexity of the questions home, instigating the audiences’ figurative returning to their own affective constructs of home, prompting a revaluation of being at and making home.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 111.

## Methodology

This section prepares the methodological foundation for the dramaturgical analyses in the three chapters, and, in particular, some comparative analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 which are the primary methods employed in the thesis. The consideration of home in this study is broadly situated within the perspective of humanistic geography which is ultimately concerned with ‘achieving a better understanding of man and his condition [...] by studying people’s relations with nature, their geographical behaviour, as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place’<sup>222</sup>, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, a Chinese-born academic who, as the editors of *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (2013) note, has been ‘highly influential in [...] forwarding geographical scholarship centred on humanism and metaphysics using ideas from phenomenology and existentialism’<sup>223</sup>. I am particularly interested in what the plays, performances and installations under scrutiny tell us about the experience of inhabitation and the rhythms of the everyday – the practices of being at and making home – and how relationships to home and the perception of “not-home” are shaped. I explore, in short, the ways of sensing home.

This tracing of affective imprints of experiences across art forms employs a phenomenological approach, drawing on the school of philosophical inquiry formally established in Germany by Edmund Husserl, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The method is chiefly focused on examining the concrete experience and the structures of human consciousness or in Husserl’s words,

has, as its exclusive concern, experiences intuitively seizable and analysable in the pure generality of their essence, [...] must describe in terms of their essential concepts and their governing formulae of essence, the essences

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<sup>222</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, “Humanistic Geography” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 66, No. 2 (1976), 266.

<sup>223</sup> Noel Castree, Rob Kitchin, Alisdair Rogers, eds. *A Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 532.

which directly make themselves known in intuition, and the connections which have their roots purely in such essences.<sup>224</sup>

Home appears to be a commonly examined subject in phenomenological thought. The writings of the aforementioned Martin Heidegger and French scholar Gaston Bachelard – whom the discussion will bring forth in Chapter 2 – stand out and continue to garner critical attention. Though their philosophical postulates are by no means uniform, both encourage a reappraisal of habitation awareness by resorting to poetic imagery and produce meandering but emotionally charged narratives. In them, dwelling – in the sense of existing but also as a solid structure – is raised to a sort of hallowed standing, and introspection is hailed as the principal prism of perception typically conducted in seclusion from the rest of the world. The value of such penetrating analysis of home is its reflexivity – as philosopher Robert Sokolowski suggests in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000), it enables us ‘not only [to] think things given to us in experience [but] also understand ourselves as thinking them.’<sup>225</sup> Acknowledging the importance of the authors’ contribution to knowledge, the influential Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, regarded, according to scholar Chris Butler, ‘as one of the theoretical pioneers of the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences’<sup>226</sup>, identifies a disjunction between these putatively ‘sacred, quasi-religious’<sup>227</sup> accounts of home and the social reality out of which they emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. He characterises their work as ‘merely a historico-poetic reality [created by] an obsessive quality [that] persists in art, poetry, drama and philosophy’ and appears entirely disengaged from ‘the terrible urban reality which the twentieth century has instituted, embellishing it with a nostalgic aura.’<sup>228</sup>

Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling apply similarly scathing criticism to humanistic geography (of which phenomenology is often considered a subdivision) on account of the

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<sup>224</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Shorter Logical Investigations*, transl. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2000), 86.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>226</sup> Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.

<sup>227</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 121.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

‘romanticized notions of home and [the] inadequate understanding of the relations between social structures and experience of place.’<sup>229</sup> The pair highlight another significant limitation of this branch of thinking about home, proposing that ‘as haven, as a sanctuary from society into which one retreats, [it] may describe the lives of men for whom home is a refuge from work but certainly does not describe the lives of women for whom home is a workplace.’<sup>230</sup> Feminist perspectives are essential to the contemporary understanding of home and shed light on a history of gender inequality to the preservation of which the home as site – the (family) house – has been integral. As I discuss in Chapter 3, the problematic of gender resonated in Ibsen’s nineteenth-century theatrical renderings of home in ways that foreground the examination of the subject in the feminist performance of Bobby Baker over a hundred years later. In an attempt to present a balanced and informed argument, this thesis inflects the phenomenological framework throughout to incorporate views that challenge its discursive precepts (and its perceived insularity).

From the second half of the twentieth century and with considerable proliferation over the last several years, the theme of marginality and oppression within the trope of home has also been marked by the global processes of migration. Whether voluntary or forced, migratory movement appears to incite polarizing debates, eliciting a broad spectrum of economic, political and social viewpoints. As we will see especially in Chapter 2, a variety of cultural factors intrude upon the seemingly stable conceptions of home in the Western world in relation to these issues. These have, among other, exposed the vulnerability of intercultural dialogue under the threat of obstinate prejudice as well as the structural imbalances of globalised economies, accentuating the ever-widening gap between areas of prosperity and poverty (and war and peace). Though the (more personal) questions of home are often merely implied or in the background of the polemic – an afterthought – theatre and performance remind us that their consideration is not only valuable but urgent and essential.

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<sup>229</sup> Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006), 14.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Adopting the phenomenological inquiry as an approach in analysis, this thesis integrates into the examination of home in theatre and performance a number of scholarly fields. Contributions of varying scope from cultural studies, feminism, critical theory, anthropology, literary sources, questions of material culture as well as migration, exile and travel combine to firmly ground the experience of art in historical contexts but also social and political discourses. This broad perspective informs the discerning of the dramaturgical structures at work to demonstrate how the transportive meanings of home produced by the artists affect audiences and reflect on what kind of transformation they encourage.

### **A Note on the Biographical**

Although not a key theme of this thesis, the biographical is quietly present throughout and requires a mention in this Introduction. Fragments from Henrik Ibsen's life in Chapter 1 highlight his own struggles with the meanings of home, both in the sense of the domestic space and nationality. It has been suggested that Ibsen led a materially austere existence and that in early adulthood and during the time abroad he was frequently relocating his family from one abode to the next. Similarly, his correspondence indicates a recurring uncertainty about whether he should (re-)settle in Norway following many years of (self-imposed) exile in Germany and Italy. While this information does not feature prominently in my dramaturgical analysis of his plays, it nevertheless assists in providing a comprehensive account of the artist.

It proves particularly useful for the structure of Chapter 2 where the emphasis on the problematic of exile revisits some aspects of Ibsen's biography. The artist in this thesis whose life is arguably most firmly inscribed into her work is Mona Hatoum. Her pieces are often highly autobiographical and as such candidly revealing of her and her family's personal lives. A lack of scholarly awareness of the complex geographical rootlessness that marked Hatoum's career compromises a thorough understanding of her oeuvre and so, in line with many other critics who study her work, I dedicate a substantial portion of Chapter 2 to her biography.

By the same token, the confessional style of Bobby Baker's performance art would appear to be similarly prone to sharing (auto)biographical material. Like Hatoum, Baker often

leaves the impression that she does not hold back from exposing very private thoughts and feelings. However, as I outline early on in Chapter 3, we should note that an important element of Baker's conceit is the theatrical rendering of her character (or on-stage persona) and that this enables her to play with different shades of authenticity, allowing for the possibility of (occasional) departure from the strictly autobiographical. The artists gathered in this thesis inflect biography in different ways and given how home permeates our everyday lives the intrusion of the biographical is perhaps inescapable.

## **The Chapters**

The first chapter, in three parts, considers the representations of home in the prose plays of Henrik Ibsen. Part I opens with a brief section on Ibsen's own relationship to home, that is, the various dwelling circumstances he encountered, and suggests that these experiences have shaped his sensibility to the questions of home that he explores at length throughout the prose oeuvre. The sections that follow then situate Ibsen's dramatic examination of home in the theatrical landscape of his time. They look at some of the key influences on his development as a dramatist, focusing particularly on the traditions of the melodrama and the well-made play which represent a kind of starting point for the later prose pieces but also some theoretical writings on the theatre that led him towards a new conception of (modern) drama.

Part II examines Ibsen's treatment of home across five plays – *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *The Master Builder* (1892) and *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896) – and identifies two key dramaturgical building blocks of the performativity of home in them: the material culture of the home and the characters' domestic dispositions, that is, their behaviours and the ways they interact with each other. Each of these performativities of home is discussed in a separate section. Focusing first on the material property of the chair, I engage with the writings of two prominent twentieth-century critics of Ibsen and the naturalistic aesthetic in the theatre more broadly – Vsevolod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht – and argue that rather than an imposition to (creating) art,

furniture, in Ibsen's drama, is a crucial dramaturgical element of the transportive journey. The next section looks at Ibsen's building of interpersonal relationships through the analysis of *A Doll's House*, in particular the dynamics between the main characters Nora and Torvald Helmer. I propose that their domestic dispositions serve as an important tool of dramatic escalation and that their respective attitudes to home, which reveal themselves most forcefully in their discussion of the(ir) marriage, encourage the audience's critical evaluation of their own sense of home. I conclude that with this careful examination of the patterns of inhabitation, Ibsen formulates what it means to be at home as well as the processes of making (one's) home in the theatre which leads to what I call the overflowing of home in the plays that follow.

Drawing on the performativities of home in and the transportive qualities of *A Doll's House*, the remaining sections of Part II analyse the other four Ibsen plays included in this thesis and pair them up as follows: *Ghosts* and *The Master Builder*; *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. These couplings reflect shared conceptual premises alongside a range of continuities and recurring motifs in Ibsen's representations of home that stretch across almost two decades of his career. The discussion on the abodes of the Alving (in *Ghosts*) and the Solnesses (*The Master Builder*) centres on the performative expressions of (home) building and homelessness. As I show, both are experienced by the main characters, Helen Alving and Halvard Solness, who possess the means (and in Solness' case also to expertise) to build homes but are in themselves emotionally homeless – estranged from those who surround them and fundamentally dislodged in the places they inhabit.

The homes of the Ekdals (*The Wild Duck*) and the Borkmans are marked by the tension between the domestic space and the spaces beyond its confines – the interior and the outside. In these two plays, Ibsen integrates the outdoors and the household on stage to highlight the positioning of the domestic within the wider geographical scale, suggesting that a sense of home is shaped through their interrelation. While *The Wild Duck* examines the relationship between the individual and the forest, *John Gabriel Borkman* establishes a sophisticated vision of an orderly and highly-developed society with a prosperous global



economy. This society and the forest in *The Wild Duck*, I argue, constitute another two of Ibsen's performative expressions of home which incite contemplation on (how we understand) home.

The final part of the first chapter, Part III, tackles two points – what I refer to as the spectatorial denial of the figurative transportation by the audience in Ibsen's own time period and the author's questioning of the limitations of the genre through the figure of the domestic space. Throughout the chapter my reading of Ibsen points to dramaturgical elements that establish home as a performative entity able to prompt a reflective re-evaluation of one's habitation. However, it should be noted, that to Ibsen's audiences in the late-nineteenth century such critical engagement was not a customary response as his portrayal of home (life) often met with disapproval and condemnation. Juxtaposing contrasting reactions, I contemplate the factors that inhibited the transportive journeys of Ibsen's contemporaries. The chapter closes with a section that explores how home figures in Ibsen's examination of the conventions of realistic drama, in particular, the spatial limitations of the domestic setting. I argue that he challenges the postulates of conventional theatre progressively from *A Doll's House* to *John Gabriel Borkman* which underscores a persistent formal experimentation, although owing to his own time and place the prose plays necessarily remain within the constraints of the genre. As I conclude, the experimental curiosity that marks Ibsen's work throughout offers the opportunity to consider his legacy beyond the drama of realism (and naturalism) in forms of postmodern performance which is where the thesis departs in the remaining chapters.

Discussing Ibsen's prose plays without the knowledge of the Norwegian language, I rely throughout the thesis on translations and this requires a brief explanatory note. Toril Moi devotes an appendix section to the difficulties of capturing 'the intensity and suggestiveness'<sup>231</sup> of Ibsen's idiom in English 'without [also] losing the colloquial

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<sup>231</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 328.

everydayness of the language.’<sup>232</sup> Moi demonstrates some of the issues presented to translators into English through a comparison of four short examples<sup>233</sup> and draws attention to a more comprehensive analysis of such challenges conducted by scholar Inga-Stina Ewbank whose own professional experience included language consulting on several British productions in the 1970s and 1980s. Ewbank’s article “Translating Ibsen for the English Stage” establishes three competing ‘aims of dramatic translation: faithfulness to the original text, speakability for the actors, and intelligibility for the audience.’<sup>234</sup> In adopting these categories, Ewbank follows fellow Scandinavian scholar Egil Törnqvist<sup>235</sup> and discusses how all three are (or can be) achieved across brief passages from a number of plays.

A detailed, comparative investigation of the translational problems in Ibsen’s prose plays is beyond the scope of this project. My interest in home focuses primarily on how the word itself (and its possible synonyms) features in the dialogue and, in particular, on the meanings it creates. My research has comprised looking at the translations by William Archer (Ibsen’s contemporary and first translator into English), James McFarlane and Michael Meyer (both mid- to late twentieth century scholars). While my conclusion has been that in the studied plays their respective employment of home (the lexeme and the broader notion) does not occasion demonstrable qualitative variation, I have, nevertheless, resorted to quoting only from the latter. This, above all, allows for a level of consistency in linguistic rendition across the five plays I refer to extensively in the three chapters. It is also worth noting, however, that Meyer’s translations ‘have been the most frequently used in British productions’<sup>236</sup> of Ibsen since their emergence from the 1960s onwards. Though not without defects – indeed, Ewbank’s article indicates some of them – they have been a central source for readers, scholars and theatre professionals alike.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> These include translations by Rolf Fjelde, Brian Johnston, James McFarlane and Michael Meyer.

<sup>234</sup> Inga-Stina Ewbank, “Translating Ibsen for the English Stage” in *Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek* 19, (1998), 52.

<sup>235</sup> Ewbank states that her discussion is modelled on Törnqvist’s study of Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata* (1907).

<sup>236</sup> Peter France, ed. *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 576.

The second chapter explores the questions of home and displacement by relating Ibsen's prose plays to the work of sculptor and installationist (and in fact all-round multidisciplinary artist) Mona Hatoum. The discussion is divided into four parts. In the opening part, I propose that the figurative transportation in Hatoum's art invariably stems from her evocation of the feelings of destruction and loss. Her representations of home often stem from personal experiences as a descendant of Palestinian refugees who – having spent most of her adult life separated from her family and emotionally unattached to (the idea of) a homeland – has been scarred by feelings of dislodgement and locational uncertainty. The biographical aspect of Hatoum's work, which recurs throughout this chapter, enables me to establish a link with Henrik Ibsen whose life too, as I show, was marked by a sense of displacement and distance from the fatherland.

I ground this connection in the figure of exile which I conceptualize through Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological writings on intimate spaces of habitation. The second part of the chapter takes up to task of reconciling the differing political, cultural and historical circumstances of the artists' exilic predicaments in order to allow for a sustained discussion of the commonalities in their artistic practice. I maintain that a useful device to view Hatoum's and Ibsen's exiles is the concept of the nation-state as the artists' experiences of it reinforce (or replicate) the formal, that is, aesthetic disparities in their respective modernist and postmodernist oeuvres. I further contend that in the relationship between Ibsen and Hatoum exile comes to constitute a dominant performative expression of home and that the notion of geographical distance leads both to employ Bachelard's notion of the miniature as a strategy for artistic creation.

The third part of the chapter focuses on the dramaturgical parallels between Ibsen and Hatoum and identifies three strands of overlapping. These involve Hatoum's installations of domestic spaces in the works *Homebound* (2000), *Home* (1999) and *Mobile Home II* (2005) which, I propose, are reminiscent of Ibsen's stage sets. I bring them together through a critical analysis of the work of theorist Michael Fried and reject his view that installation art and theatre are redundant artistic practices unable to critically engage

audiences. In response, I claim that they encourage a figurative transportation through their evocation of home. The second strand of the dramaturgical affinity between the artists is represented by a series of Hatoum's sculptures of a range of domestic objects. I argue that these possess an internal dramaturgy that resembles the nineteenth-century German playwright Gustav Freytag's idea of the pyramid of dramatic action to reveal another dimension of Hatoum's affinity with Ibsen. The final parallel between them concerns Hatoum's maps of the world which are made of different materials and typically evoke the contrasting qualities of intimacy (or repose) and threat. I discuss that through both meanings these works call to mind Ibsen's integration of the domestic space with the (outside) environment in *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman* and therefore complement the transportive experiences through home in his dramas.

In the fourth part of the chapter, my exclusive focus is Hatoum's renowned map installation *Present Tense* (1996) which returns us to the question of biography as it relates to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine and, in particular, the borders between them. I treat this work independently of Ibsen on account of the global relevance of the continuously unpredictable political situation between these two Middle-Eastern territories. As I argue, at the root of their conflict is a basic human need for home and belonging. Through a careful outline of each country's historical position on the dispute, I confront the writings of one important literary figure from each side, Mahmoud Darwish and Amos Oz, to inquire how art might contribute to a resolution and posit that the work of Mona Hatoum could point a possible way forward.

In Chapter 3, I investigate home as a gendered concept and bring Henrik Ibsen into dialogue with the work of performance artist Bobby Baker. The chapter comprises three parts and as with the preceding discussion of Mona Hatoum, I combine the comparative analysis of Baker and Ibsen with a close examination of certain elements of Baker's oeuvre in less immediate correspondence to the Norwegian dramatist. The first part of the chapter is structured on a series of "encounters" as I analyse the performative expressions of home in Baker's seminal piece *Drawing on A Mother's Experience* (1988) and propose that the

themes explored by the artist enable her to “meet” with two of Ibsen’s female dramatic characters – Nora Helmer and Gina Ekdal (of *A Doll’s House* and *The Wild Duck* respectively). I argue that *Drawing on a Mother’s Experience* establishes a parallel with *A Doll’s House* through the problematic of gender inequality and offers an equally powerful articulation of feminism at the end of the twentieth century as Ibsen’s play does more than a hundred years prior.

While Baker conveys her anger about feeling confined to the home she also communicates a sense of excitement about the unexpected ways in which the domestic space can be experienced as fulfilling. As I expand further, the latter element aligns Baker with Gina Ekdal, a loving mother and housewife who always puts the needs of the members of her family before her own. In my reading, the parallel with Bobby Baker situates Gina as a precursor of the postulates of the second-wave of feminism. Despite the fact that their historical, that is, political and cultural, circumstances differ, I suggest that their predicaments nevertheless bear a great deal in common.

Though extensive analyses of *A Doll’s House* and *The Wild Duck* already feature in the first chapter of the thesis, I re-engage with them in some detail but with a specific (and different) focus so as to complement and refine the existing discussion rather than encroach on it. In the case of Nora, I look at how Ibsen’s construction of the character (and the play as such) echoes some of the leading voices of the first-wave of feminism in the nineteenth century. Although he distanced himself from the feminist interpretations of the play, Nora Helmer has come to represent one of the most enduring symbols of the cause which continues to inspire.

Building on the dramaturgical examination of *Drawing on a Mother’s Experience*, Part II of the chapter deals with the piece *Cook Dems* (1990) which in many ways continues the ideas of its predecessor. I look at this work through the lens of the artist’s employment of food as a performative expression of home which complements that of housework. As I show, food enables Baker to both re-assert her identity as a woman as well as interrogate the gendered social “norms” that perpetuate oppressive attitudes. The final part of Chapter 3

examines Baker's work *Kitchen Show* (1993) which took place in her own home. The initial section of this part puts Baker's decision to use her family's abode as a theatrical venue in the context of what could be called a tradition of site-specific performance at home. I contend that this varied tradition can be found in a number of periods of history and artistic movements, although it appears to not have been widely theorized in theatre and performance scholarship so far. As I show in what is necessarily only a brief overview, there is a range of theatrical uses of home as well as impulses or reasons that lead to the employment of this locus in performance but these suitably reflect the performative properties of home. The next section examines *Kitchen Show* in more detail. It proposes that its structure of "actions" and "marks" comprises performative expressions of home through which the recognisable household routines such as peeling fruits and vegetables or organising drawers become facilitators of a figurative transportation to one's own sense of habitation and in particular one's emotional investment in the dwelling space.

### **Enveloped By Home: A Subject Position**

This Introduction opened with a memory of a theatre performance, the experience of which unexpectedly led me to – confronted me with – the questions of home. It prompted me to wonder what forms a sense of home and what the ways in which we understand home might say about who we are, how we live, and, crucially, how theatre and performance might help us think through that. In the chapters that follow, I aim to pursue these questions. I pose them with a particular kind of home in mind – one that combines spatio-structural properties and perceptual properties, that is, home as an enclosed material entity in which emotional attachments are created: a domestic interior.

I examine Henrik Ibsen, Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker as artists who offer distinct and yet related critiques of home as domestic space. I situate them within historical, ideological and aesthetic contexts and in the analysis of their works I pay attention to the ways in which they engage spectatorial sensibilities through what I call performative expressions of home – images, actions, objects and concepts that articulate or evoke

meanings of home. As a researcher, I, too, much like the artists I study, am situated in various contexts and discursive provenances through which I occupy a vantage point to view the world. To this viewpoint belong the choices I make. I have argued in the earlier section of the Introduction why I think a thesis juxtaposing the representations of home in the work of Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker is worthwhile and, by drawing on existing critical accounts and models of scholarly thought, I have outlined how the divergences of time period and art form between them can be reconciled. But I have not, so far, addressed the arguably simpler question of why these artists pique my curiosity.

The answer is twofold. Firstly, their critiques of home strike me as expounding the philosophical posture of dissent; they are acts of opposition, voices of a minority in pursuit of the questions of home, a central and multi-layered concern for the humankind. Secondly, and here I am thinking particularly of Baker and Hatoum, they are voices whose experiences I – a white, European, middle-class male – cannot claim as my own. I have stated above that Hatoum's examination of human displacement through war and Baker's probing of gender inequality are two of the pressing discourses of home in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (so far). However, both of these issues extend beyond home as a domestic space which is how I primarily look at them in the ensuing chapters. Both are of fundamental significance to how we conceive of ourselves as a humanity; our identity and sense of place are inseparably bound up with them. By exploring the artistic practices of Bobby Baker and Mona Hatoum and delving into the (historical, ideological and aesthetic) nuances of their subject positions, I wish to inform, challenge and expand my own.

To label Henrik Ibsen as an oppositional force and a minority, merits clarification. Chapter 1 will show that Ibsen in some ways was in the minority in his formative years as an artist. He was financially less well off than most of his peers and unlike most of them he did not attend university. He was long denied government grants despite evidence of talent and it was only after he relocated abroad that he slowly began receiving recognition. When his prose plays – an important focus for this thesis – started to get produced, he was heavily criticised for the themes he engaged with and was often viewed with contempt. It goes

without saying, however, that Ibsen also had many supporters, particularly among critics and fellow artists, and their championing of him was arguably as instrumental as the plays in making him part of the literary canon (which is where so many scholars quoted in this thesis see Ibsen's rightful place in literary and also theatre history).

In the context of this study, the positioning of Ibsen within the canonical, what the eminent scholar Harold Bloom refers to as the 'authoritative in our culture'<sup>237</sup>, threatens to create a hierarchical relationship between the dramatist on one side and Baker and Hatoum on the other. However, this would be contradictory to my aim of considering the work of these artists as equally persuasive in adopting an oppositional, dissenting view and of going against the grain. What is more, to follow the classifications of the canon in this way would also perpetuate what many critics see as its main problem – the exclusionary politics in the process of the its formation, that is, the historical omission of women and authors of non-European (Western) cultures from the canon. As Bloom, a vocal traditionalist in this sense, writes, since at least the poststructuralist idea of 'the death of the author, proclaimed by Foucault, Barthes and many clones after them, [the canon has been beset by the] anticanonical myth, similar to the battle cry of resentment [intended to] dismiss [...] the dead, white (European) males'.<sup>238</sup> This frequently used phrase helpfully illustrates the history of the Western world in terms of gender privilege and ethnic dominance both of which are major themes in the oeuvres of Bobby Baker and Mona Hatoum. Their critiques of home are ideologically closely aligned as well as contemporaneous with the historical revision of the canon from the feminist and multicultural criticism's standpoints. Surveying the debate's developments in the last two decades of the twentieth century, American literary scholar Laurie Grobman notes the connections as follows:

[f]eminist criticism's challenge to the literary canon opened the canon to minority writers and, following feminist criticism's groundbreaking work,

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<sup>237</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 1.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



multicultural criticism also challenges the canon, critical categories and paradigms, and criteria for literary excellence. Both concern themselves with the oppressive and exclusionary nature of the Western canon [...] to reveal gender and/or racist biases and stereotypes, and the recovery of long-excluded voices and texts.<sup>239</sup>

The work of Baker and Hatoum positions itself firmly within these ideological postulates as they play out in the (visual art and performance art adjacent) critical field of literary studies. Whereas I endeavour to attend to these relations of power thoughtfully throughout Chapters 2 and 3, it is also not my intention in what follows to dispute Ibsen's canonical status, if only for the fact that my insights on his craft owe a great debt to the abundance of scholarship that his work has attracted precisely because of its standing. I propose instead to look at the three artists through the lens of the everyday domestic reality as it may be gleaned from the construction of dramatic characters, confessional accounts of a solo performance artist or installations and sculptures. Whilst remaining attentive to the historical and geographical specificities of ideas of home that surround the oeuvres of Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker, I contend that in their art home reveals itself as a highly sought currency of exchanges between people. By engaging with their work, we can better understand ourselves in this world.

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<sup>239</sup> Laurie Grobman, "Toward a Multicultural Pedagogy: Literary and Nonliterary Traditions", *MELUS* Vol. 26, No. 1 (2001), 229.

## Laying the Foundations: Dramatic Homes of Henrik Ibsen

### Entering

Henrik Ibsen's innovative and extensive treatment of the questions of home at the end of the nineteenth century provides a vital conceptual reference for the theatre and performance practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ibsen cements the notion of home into the consciousness of theatrical experimentation through the interplay of naturalistic domestic architectures, the examination of the burning social questions of his era and the struggles of an individual's inner thoughts. This confluence of aesthetic principles and thematic concerns marks the beginning of modern drama, an important period in theatre history at the heart of which lie Ibsen's so-called prose plays. Starting with the tentatively realistic *Pillars of Society* (1877), which announced Ibsen's departure from writing in verse, and concluding just over two decades later with a distinctly symbolist play *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), his oeuvre reveals a master of theatrical craft and a perceptive observer of human nature.

This chapter argues that home represents a crucial element of Ibsen's dramaturgy and incites a figurative transportation 'out of the realm of the ordinary,'<sup>240</sup> a perceptual process that will be conceived by German philosopher Martin Heidegger as one in which a work of art makes a profound effect and stimulates a re-appraisal of one's understanding of oneself and the world. In the prose plays this emotionally probing journey is predicated on the dramatist's nuanced sensibility to how humans construct and inhabit personal spaces, negotiate the interweaving of the private and the public, relate to objects and architectures that surround them, and form (and re-form) their identity, fundamental values and belief systems. In other words, the transportive experience derives from the author's attentiveness

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<sup>240</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, transl. Albert Hofstadter (London: Routledge, 2010), 123.

to the performativity of home: the varied range of concepts, actions, intentions, processes, symbols and emotions – *expressions* – through which humanity continually manifests how permeated it is with the notion of inhabitation.

The meaning of home in Ibsen's oeuvre extends well beyond the immediately perceptible domestic space within which his plays are visually framed. The dramatist surpasses the confines of these spaces, penetrating into the core of the idea of dwelling and the subtleties of human existence. Home is, therefore, a multivalent conception. It operates primarily as the locus of the drama but it also acts as the engine of dramatic conflict and the shaper of behaviours and the relationships forged with others – home is at once a spatial unit and a complex metaphor. No dramatist in the history of theatre, appears to have matched Ibsen's wide-ranging and consistent treatment of home and any attempt at such theatrical examination inevitably returns us to the work of the Norwegian playwright as a permanent reference, an archetype of sorts. As I later discuss, the setting of home, and in particular the (naturalistic) accuracy of its visual impression, exposed Ibsen to artistic rejection in some quarters of the twentieth-century theatre landscape. In my view, the author's insightful investigation of the figure of home is precisely what ensures his lasting originality and on-going artistic relevance.

## **Part I**

### **‘Where Shall I Find My Home?’**

In 1885, nearing his sixtieth birthday, Henrik Ibsen hesitantly began pondering a return to his native Norway which he had left over two decades earlier. The charm of Rome that had so mesmerised him when he first arrived started to wear off and opting to relocate to Germany, where he had also lived on several occasions during his (self-imposed) exile, he settled in Munich – putting the homecoming off for another six years. When that time came, he found it difficult to suppress the niggling sense of apprehension, intimating rhetorically in a letter to a friend: ‘where shall I find my home? [...] Norway is a difficult country to have

as a fatherland.’<sup>241</sup> Although reluctantly, he came back for good and spent the remainder of his life in Christiania.

It was the Norwegian capital he left some two dozen years prior, a struggling artist chased by his creditors. He had lived at seven different addresses in only four years leading up to his departure and although later, abroad, his financial situation improved somewhat, he seemed unable to shake off the locational rootlessness, moving residence recurrently, often occupying sparsely furnished abodes.<sup>242</sup> As biographer Michael Meyer reports, William Archer, Ibsen’s first translator into English, befriended the distinguished dramatist and noted his unusually ascetic approach to interior decoration. On a visit to one of his apartments, he found the dwelling ‘comfortable, yet comfortless [...] with no air of home about it.’<sup>243</sup> On a different occasion, a Swedish journalist, again according to Meyer, formed a similar impression noting that the ‘living room [appears] a little stiff and cold [before concluding that] Ibsen doesn’t want a home.’<sup>244</sup>

Ibsen’s transitory attitude and frugality to material culture may have originated in early childhood when his father, a wealthy merchant, declared bankruptcy, forcing the family to relocate and leaving them on the brink of poverty. The decline of the family’s fortunes had a profound effect on the young Ibsen: from the day he took up the post of pharmacy assistant in a nearby town at the age of 16, his interaction with even the closest relatives became at best sporadic and this would not change as he grew older. The circumstances that led him to seek geographical separation from his ‘fatherland’ (as he put it) were similarly distressing. After he was unable to secure a place at university – a position of considerable social importance in mid-nineteenth century Norway – he continued writing and took up leading posts in theatres in Bergen and Christiania. The country’s theatre scene at the time was, however, in a rather embryonic state and although Ibsen wrote several plays during this period, the resources available to him, both artistic and financial, were utterly

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<sup>241</sup> Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 793. No source is cited.

<sup>242</sup> See Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).

<sup>243</sup> Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 518. No source is cited.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 578. No source is cited.

meagre. Overlooked by the cultural elite and officials, he was refused the generous support that some of his fellow artists were able to enjoy and when the ever-increasing debts started to catch up with him, he decided to break away.

Although this study largely resists a systematic mapping of the author's biography to their body of work – a common scholarly method in literary criticism – the juxtaposition of the snippets from Ibsen's life and his prose plays is almost irresistible. If his homes were sparse, the didascalia throughout the realistic oeuvre is copious, describing the imagined world of the play in great detail and filling up the stage with furnishings, ornaments and other trappings of material culture. And despite his frequently disparaging attitude towards the cultural and political life in Norway, Ibsen's plays, in the words of Toril Moi, 'conjure up a thoroughly Norwegian world,'<sup>245</sup> whether by invoking the harsh northern landscape of small town communities, often cut off from one another or the emotional reticence of the people ingrained in the stern Protestant tradition. Ibsen's propensity for physical distance from his originary environment, a notion I explore further in the next chapter, his grounding of dramatic action in domestic settings which are visually in diametric opposition to his own decorative preferences and, finally, his insistence on locating the plays in his native land all reveal an artist whose life has been shaped by the continuously shifting and invariably growing definition of the meanings of home.

It could be argued, therefore, that this exacerbated relation to home enables Ibsen to detect the performative potential of the numerous expressions of home. He is brilliantly attuned to the idiosyncrasies of domestic spaces: the bourgeois pretensions of morality and interpersonal harmony in the carefully designed interiors that tacitly affirm the reputable social standing of their owners. Underneath this façade he identifies an inner emptiness which remains insufficiently resolved through familial relationships, leading to socially undesirable manifestations of emotional rupture and personal instability. The consequences of these psychological collisions bespeak a complex human condition that combines such

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<sup>245</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 49.

divergent notions as anxiety, the quest for personal freedom and scepticism. As these struggles unfold against the backdrop of the material presence of objects that represent a home, they initiate a heightened sensibility towards the very site that envelops them. In other words, they construct a powerful affectivity of home, a set of intersecting emotional dispositions that contribute to how people create a sense of self and relate to the experience of dwelling.

### **From Candyfloss to Masterpiece**

Ibsen's earliest and most profound influences in the momentous transition to writing drama in prose after the successes of dramatic poems *Brand* (1866) and *Peer Gynt* (1867) are commonly grouped around two prominent points: the works of the French playwright Eugene Scribe, the founder of the romantic theatrical (sub)genre of the well-made play, and the theoretical writings of the German literary historian Hermann Hettner. Neither of them, it is worth pointing out, specifically delves into the complexity of the meaning of home yet the "home as site" is a constant, if unacknowledged, presence in their outputs, allowing us to better appreciate the process of Ibsen's journey from verse to prose in drama. Scribe was a prolific and enormously popular dramatist not only in Paris but throughout mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Ibsen encountered his work – in translation – while resident dramatist and stage manager at the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen where he directed a number of the author's plays. These were aimed at bourgeois audiences and full of intrigue and high emotion as well as extremely well crafted, governed by a precise economy of scene and a continuous flow of action commonly located in a domestic setting.

The *pièce bien faite* is closely related to the genre of melodrama and both of these dramatic strands were corollaries of one of the most intense periods of French literary history – the battle between the neoclassical and romantic ideologies in the aftermath of the Revolution. Romanticism rebelled against the prescriptive tenets of classicist theatre which operated a range of artistic restrictions with the ambition of producing aesthetically and morally pleasing theatre. The romantic creed rejected such constraints and espoused that art

should explore the inner life of the individual and the realm of the imagination. The advocates of the new movement in France, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas and Alfred de Vigny in particular, hailed Shakespeare's disregard for tradition and "literary" rules of form and in the spirit of revolt called for the abandonment of verse in preference to writing drama in prose. They emphasised the importance of the pursuit of truth and saw the source of artistic inspiration in man's struggle against the social conventions.

Hugo's *Hernani* (1830) was an attack on classicist values and its premiere caused something of a pandemonium in the French artistic circles. Written in the manner of courtly intrigue plays, it was, however, in some respects still anticipating rather than fully installing the new doctrine. In contrast, Dumas' *Antony* (1831) was a play of prophetic proportions – as theatre theorist Marvin Carlson has noted in his comprehensive study *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (1993), it stood as 'a pioneer in what would become a favourite type of nineteenth-century theatre, the "shocking drama" of contemporary life,'<sup>246</sup> that is, the kind of drama that, decades later, Ibsen would go on to explore.

Melodrama, which first emerged at the end of the eighteenth century, in many ways differed from the ideals pursued by these authors. It attracted theatregoers in search of distraction rather than engagement with the issues of the(ir) present-day. Dramatising 'the triumph of virtue, punishment and reward,'<sup>247</sup> to quote from Patrice Pavis' *Dictionary of the Theatre* (1998), the genre employed simplistic characterisation, allowing easy identification of the "good" and the "bad" types and an equally clear delineation of positive and negative feelings. Through the use of unexpected twists and exaggerated language, melodrama sought to deliver moral guidance, generally with the function of a social corrective and often with providential leanings. Early melodramas were set in fairy-tale-like worlds – from Gothic

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<sup>246</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 212.

<sup>247</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, trans. Christine Schantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 208.

castles to more rural environments – but by 1850 plays increasingly came to centre on contemporary (urban) familial settings.

This transition reflects the social change instigated by the revolutionary tide at the end of the preceding century and the expanse of industrialisation. As a consequence, the newly-stratified, reconfigured, and above all growing bourgeoisie became the primary patron of the melodramatic pastime. An early scholarly evaluation of these audiences attributes the thriving of the genre to ‘an inertness in the minds of spectators and the wish to be amused without the slightest exertion on their own parts or any exercise whatsoever of their intellectual power.’<sup>248</sup> It is worth noting that some twentieth-century studies have challenged such assumptions. For example, Elaine Hadley’s *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace* (1995), which focuses particularly on English melodrama, claims that ‘most twentieth century critics and [...] nineteenth century observers who condescendingly define melodrama in terms of wish fulfilment and sensory excitement [have disregarded the value of the genre] as a polemical response to the social, economic, and epistemological changes that characterised the market society in the nineteenth century.’<sup>249</sup> Hadley’s examination considers a number of cultural factors to show that the perceived spectatorial imperative of the enjoyment of the fictional worlds of behaviourally extravagant characters should be understood in a broader socio-political and historical context.

The well-made play draws on the tradition of the melodrama. Scribe established a series of precise rules which ensured a smooth and effective unfolding of events. The action followed a strict sequence of stages starting with the exposition which outlined the essential information required for the understanding of the plot, leading to the complication where the state of affairs would suddenly be disrupted, turning things for the worse, creating a degree of suspense. Eventually, however, the obstacles would be overcome through means

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<sup>248</sup> Emily Allen “The Victorian Novel and Theatre,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 574.

<sup>249</sup> Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1880-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 2-3. See also Jim Davis, “Melodrama on and off the Stage,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 686-701.



previously known to the spectator but unknown to the central hero and, finally, satisfactory resolution would ensue. Scribe's techniques, it should be noted, are not solely of his own invention not least as they build on the principles established by the Greek philosopher of the Classical period Aristotle in his *Poetics* (335 BCE).<sup>250</sup> The particular feature of Scribe's approach is the stricture with which he arranges the material and the purposely mechanical dramaturgy which produces stock formulas – well-tested, reliable recipes of sorts – always malleable enough to be reproduced for a slightly different dramatic situation.

Although Ibsen is said to have dismissed Scribe's work as 'dramatic candy-floss',<sup>251</sup> it is possible to identify elements of the melodrama and the *pièce bien faite* in his prose oeuvre. The final act of *Pillars of Society* represents a model of the melodrama's demand for the triumph of virtue over deceit: the hero, ship-builder Consul Bernick, publically admits that he has acted dishonestly and is promptly exonerated by the community for his remorse. The language employed in the play also belongs to the melodramatic register with densely-worded exchanges between the characters suggesting the grandiose and overly-emphatic style of acting associated with the romantic stage. By the time he writes *The Wild Duck* seven years later, Ibsen appears to redeploy the theatricality of affected speech in drama in the character of Hjalmar Ekdal whose diction is inflated and behaviour self-absorbed, and reminiscent of the linguistic and acting principles of the popular forms of romantic theatre.

In taking a different direction to that of the precepts of the well-made play, Ibsen establishes the home as a site of contestation thereby making it a resonant and vital element of the drama rather than merely the opportune setting of the action as used by Scribe. This can be observed in *A Doll's House*. Raymond Williams suggests that despite being considered as one of the masterpieces of modern theatre, 'the main situations [...] are typical of the intrigue drama'<sup>252</sup> while the characters 'differ very little'<sup>253</sup> from the usual romantic types. The mechanics of the melodrama in this play are particularly notable in the subplot of

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<sup>250</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics*, transl. Malcolm Heath (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

<sup>251</sup> Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 93. No source is cited.

<sup>252</sup> Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), 48.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

the bank clerk Krogstad and Nora's childhood friend Mrs Linde. The two renew their acquaintance after a number of years and become romantically involved, thereby sparing the Helmer household the embarrassment of the public pronouncement of Nora's forgery on official documents. However, we only need to look to the ending of this play (as, indeed, we shall very shortly) to appreciate how Ibsen modified the Scribean formulaic method and paved the way for drama in which characters were more psychologically nuanced and in which home as the site of oppression and interpersonal discord became a key thematic concern and dramaturgical tool.

### **The Three "R's" – Reform, Realism, Rooms**

If the melodramatic theatre and the well-made play were Ibsen's models in the craft of plot construction, the writings of theorist Hermann Hettner were a vital source of the dramatist's broader cultural understanding of the role of the theatre in society and within that, by extension, the notion of home. A contemporary of Richard Wagner and Georg Büchner, Hettner formed part of the burgeoning German theatrical tradition that stretches back to the seventeenth century's influential figure of Gotthold Lessing, widely regarded as 'the first dramaturge of modern Western theatre'<sup>254</sup> – to quote American scholar Bert Cardullo. The central tenet of Hettner's theory, published in his *Modern Drama* (1852), was that contemporary (that is, mid-nineteenth century) theatre should portray people of its age and the ways they go about their everyday lives. It should explore the relationships that the ordinary individual forms with other humans, their interaction with and perception of the society.

The element of divine intervention that characterised ancient drama and the noble pursuits of poetically-drawn Shakespearian heroes should be surpassed. Instead, modern drama should grapple with the complex social questions of the era and trace the struggles of common people as they negotiate a world in which religion and moral certitude no longer hold sway. Answers previously drawn up by the authority of the church or the despotic

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<sup>254</sup> Bert Cardullo, ed., *What is Dramaturgy* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 6.

throne are now to be found by each individual for (or even in) themselves. The moral dilemmas and social pressures in drama, Hettner held, are best resolved through characters whose motivation derives from their inner selves and through dialogue based on a nuanced examination of human psychology. The playwright should not feel obliged to instruct the audience or provide moral guidance; drama should merely present the contentious social issues, encourage reflection but resist imposing judgement.

The allusion to dramatizing the experience of the quotidian reads as an immediate invitation to locate it in the sphere of home and exploit its spatial as well as metaphorical potential. Ibsen was introduced to Hettner's book in its year of publication while on a study trip to Copenhagen and Dresden. Biographer Halvdan Koht has proposed that the dramatist saw in it 'a manifesto and a program for reform in the theatre',<sup>255</sup> and although it took another twenty-five years before Ibsen embarked on the journey towards a new theatrical epoch, he, in the words of Marvin Carlson, 'carried [Hettner's ideas] to fruition'<sup>256</sup> in an accomplished fashion. Theatre scholar David Krasner locates Hermann Hettner's theories within the political spectre of the leftist interpretation of Hegel's concept of the Absolute Spirit which represents the mental capacity to reconcile opposing world views. The resolution of such a conflict, Hegel believed, should happen at the level of reason and should be a mental process, a sort of a profound thinking-through. Philosophers of the left provenance, however, argued that the 'synthesis [of the kind that Hegel was proposing] must occur in actuality and not in the mind.'<sup>257</sup> They called for 'Hegel's concept of reason [to be replaced] by the concept of human self-consciousness [and in this way constituted] man [as] the measure of reason and history the field in which human reason realizes itself.'<sup>258</sup> It is by way of resonance of these politically inflected ideas that Hettner derives his programme for the theatre with the ordinary, but self-willed, autonomous person at the centre of the drama

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<sup>255</sup> Halvdan Koht, *Life of Ibsen* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1971), 74.

<sup>256</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 257.

<sup>257</sup> David Krasner, *A History of Modern Drama, Volume One* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 42.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

and the psychological examination of their beliefs and choices as the key to the overcoming of the challenges they face.

Krasner's reading of the political connotations of the theatre that Hermann Hettner espouses reminds us of the broader set of circumstances in which drama operated in the nineteenth century: the principal legacy of the French Revolution across the European continent was the decline of the monarchy and the fading power of the Church. Characterized by the desire for a democratic world order and the rise of nationalism, the emphasis on liberalism and greater equality of people led to ideas of individual agency and personal autonomy which worked their way into the conceptions of theatrical art. By 1848 when, across Europe, the Spring of Nations rehearsed anew some of the demands of the Revolution, romanticism had reached its peak. The intense emotionality and the archetype of the romantic hero gave way to the ideology of realism which, emerging initially in the work of French landscape painters and novelists such as Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, advocated the avoidance of stylisation and embellishment in favour of depicting the objective reality of everyday life.

Endeavouring to establish realism in the theatre, Hettner highlighted the importance of delineating the new, realistic dramatic character. As Krasner writes, in Hettner's view, theatre should no longer 'search for its protagonists on the throne of kings or from the heights of history, but rather in the lower circles of life.'<sup>259</sup> In the absence of prolific playwrights in his native Germany, we cast our eye further afield to find eligible proponents of Hettner's ideas. In France, Alexandre Dumas *fils* – the illegitimate son of the author of *Antony* – championed drama that explored social problems. The adaptation of the successful novel *La Dame aux Camélias* (1853) and the later play *La Demi-Monde* (1855) exemplify his vision. In them, Dumas *fils* portrayed the world of courtesans on the fringes of society navigating through extramarital affairs with men of influence, seeking a firm position in "respectable" circles. His intention, as literary scholar David Coward asserts in his survey of French literature, 'was to combine the social analysis of Balzac with the theatrical skills of

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

Scribe<sup>260</sup> utilizing theatre as ‘a platform for social reform.’<sup>261</sup> Together with fellow dramatist Francois Ponsard, Dumas *fils* dealt a blow to the romantic theatre, opening the door to realism on stage and, as Coward concludes, ‘his ability to write dramatic dialogue together with his sense of stage technique make him a precursor [...] of the intellectual and analytical theatre of Shaw and Ibsen.’<sup>262</sup>

In Hettner’s demolishing of the drama of the classicists there is an implicit grounding of the home as the site of dramatic conflict through references to the truthful portrayal of the struggles of contemporary people. Ibsen’s adoption of realism enabled him to explore the theatrical power of the manifold meanings of home. ‘Realistic,’ writes the American theatre historian John Louis Styan, ‘is a slippery term in dramatic criticism [since it is] axiomatic that each generation feels that its theatre is in some way more “real” than the last.’<sup>263</sup> At the time when Henrik Ibsen was gradually embracing the new dramatic idiom, the meaning of “real” in theatrical language was increasingly becoming shaped by the ground-breaking developments in the sciences which fundamentally transformed humankind’s perceptions of itself. More precisely, the period between the emergence of Hettner’s *Modern Drama* and Ibsen’s creation of *Pillars of Society*, saw the publication of works such as Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (1859) and the rise of the doctrine of Marxism both of which, in their own ways, accelerated the move away from romantic idealism and indicated a new direction – a realism inspired by scientific method, that is, naturalism, ‘an artistic movement that [aimed to] observe society as would a clinician or physiologist.’<sup>264</sup>

Just as realism in the theatre was influenced by the nineteenth-century novel, so too naturalism on stage owed its aesthetic expression to the work of, primarily, a prose writer – the French author Emile Zola. Determined to extend his ideas to drama, Zola adapted the

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<sup>260</sup> David Coward, *A History of French Literature: From Chanson Geste to Cinema* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 254.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 254-5.

<sup>263</sup> J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

<sup>264</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, trans. Christine Schantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 236.

controversial novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) into a theatre piece. The plot revolves around a young woman who convinces her lover into murdering her husband but is then haunted by guilt to the point where she commits suicide. While the subject matter proved highly contentious to the virtuous circles of the bourgeoisie, Zola's main focus was the artistic representation of Darwin's notion of determinism, both social and biological, the belief that people are fundamentally formed by the environment they are a part of and the genetic inheritance. In the case of *Thérèse* both are significant: she is a foster child who grew up under the highly controlling influence of her reclusive aunt (together with her cousin whom she is eventually forced to marry) and whose mother, we are told, was from Algeria (where *Thérèse's* father served in the navy, before dying in battle).

The heroine's origin is an important factor in making sense of Zola's naturalism more fully. In *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism and the French Realist Novel* (2016), Jennifer Yee argues that Zola's (particularly early) naturalist work possesses a colonial understanding of race where a historical rather than 'a more biological viewpoint'<sup>265</sup> of determinism prevails. As *Thérèse* meets her lover Laurent and a lustful affair ensues, Yee notes that Zola's narrative exhibits distinct colonial, imperialistic overtones: '[t]he mark of heredity appears in *Thérèse's* repressed passionate nature and sensuality, which are explained by her Algerian ancestry'<sup>266</sup>. Drawing out the heroine's traits the author juxtaposes the imagery of *Thérèse's* mother's life in a supposedly primitive African tribe with her sheltered upbringing in Normandy. This is exacerbated by Zola likening *Thérèse* to a cat, 'her feline energy'<sup>267</sup> suggestive of animalistic force and attributing an 'exotic'<sup>268</sup> quality to her which contradicts naturalism's demand for scientific analysis. It should be noted that Zola's portrayal of *Thérèse* in many ways reflects the prevalent attitudes to race in Europe at the time. These were not solely a product of the imperialist conquests (as Yee writes) by the likes of France, Spain and Britain but also, according to American sociologist Charles

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<sup>265</sup> Jennifer Yee, *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism and the French Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 182.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

Hirschman, ‘of Social Darwinism – the pseudoscientific theory of European superiority’,<sup>269</sup> that along with the ‘eugenics movement, which popularized the fear that the higher fertility of the lower social classes and inferior races would bring ruin to Western civilization’,<sup>270</sup> formed a ‘racial ideology [that] came to be more deeply entrenched in the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century.’<sup>271</sup>

Zola prefaced the play with a discussion on the principles of naturalism and these writings, more so than the play (which exposes the author’s struggle with dramatic form), remain crucial to the development of the naturalistic theatre. Outspokenly critical of the nineteenth-century stage, Zola branded the realism of Ponsard and Dumas *fils* as no more than ‘the tricks of a clever hack’<sup>272</sup> and called for a theatre that investigates, analyses and reports on life by way of facts and logic. Styan helpfully interprets the distinction between Dumas *fils* and Zola’s approaches by proposing that where the latter ‘focused upon Thérèse’s motives, probed her mind and studied the consequences of her actions,’<sup>273</sup> the former ‘would probably have made [the] murder of her husband an occasion for attacking the divorce laws.’<sup>274</sup> Zola demanded a rebirth of the theatre and his impassioned cry reveals a restless ideologue:

I am waiting for [a dramatist] to rid us of fictitious characters, of these symbols of virtue and vice which have no worth as human data. I am waiting for environment to determine the characters and the characters to act according to the logic of facts combined with logic of their own disposition.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Charles Hirschman, “Origins and Demise of the Concept of Race” in *Population and Development Review* Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004), 392.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>272</sup> Quoted in Christopher Innes, ed., *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000), 47.

<sup>273</sup> J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 38.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Emile Zola, “Naturalism on Stage” in *Playwrights on Playwriting: From Ibsen to Ionesco*, ed. Toby Cole (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 6.

In a formal sense, however, Ibsen, although he did not see many parallels between his own and Zola's work, became an influential proponent of the doctrine in the theatre – the dramatist that the French author had eagerly awaited. Ibsen's theatrical poetics, however, did not strictly grow out of Zola's conception of the art. It drew a lot more substantially from an infinitely complex interweaving of influences that, as we have seen, stretched to the beginning of the nineteenth century and comprised artistic as well as wider social factors. While the volatile politics of the mid-nineteenth century Europe oscillated between the crumbling royal absolutism and ideas of radical nationalism, romantic idealism was gradually becoming replaced by the scepticism of a society with a new sense of collective identity and a refined understanding of (personal) autonomy and will.

As Hettner rightly sensed, there was no longer room in the theatre for noble men in haunted castles. The appropriate subjects for drama were the recognisable types of the modern everyday, the detailed exploration of the subtleties of an individual's inner life and the tracing of burning social issues. To paint them objectively, as was realism's (and naturalism's) intent, was to situate them in their own surroundings and it was this realisation, coupled with the nuanced grasp of the dramaturgical techniques of the melodrama and the well-made play, that eventually enabled Ibsen to pursue the complexities of habitation behind the walls of bourgeois homes.

Tori Moi's examination of Ibsen's relationship with the tenets of aesthetic idealism offers an insightful perspective on his transition from writing in verse, flirtation with melodrama and adoption of realism and naturalism discussed above. Idealism originated in Germany in the writings of philosophers such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Schiller. As Moi notes, the creed of aesthetic idealism is predicated on three crucial terms – the beautiful, the true, and the good – and 'considers [...] them to be one [...] and considers artistic beauty to be the highest expression of this trinity.'<sup>276</sup> The theorists of idealism engage aesthetics with the fields of ethics and religion

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<sup>276</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 72.



(which was seen as the fusion of poetry and philosophy) with the outcome that, Moi proposes, their 'program holds out to us all an optimistic, utopian vision of human perfection.'<sup>277</sup> The pursuit of beauty was viewed as a service to God and by subscribing to this vision it was believed that '[h]umankind can become better, freer, more beautiful, more fulfilled.'<sup>278</sup> These ideas resonated throughout nineteenth-century Europe, including Norway, and they involved such precepts as the pre-eminence of poetry over other forms of expression, the rejection of the mundane experiences in preference to imagining ideals and adoration of women as pure and innocent.

Thus when Ibsen started to write plays in prose, putting women at the centre of the action and emphasizing their human qualities (good and bad), he instantly became a threat to the ideology, seen as vulgar and a heretic. As Moi shows, the tentacles of idealism extended beyond literature (and art); they ingrained the doctrine into public life where it fused with conservative worldviews and religious fervour. This enables us to see why, during his lifetime, the reception of Ibsen's (particularly early) prose plays was often at best negative and at worst vitriolic. I will return to this towards the end of the chapter.

### **Decadence, Detail and a Debt to Diderot**

Naturalism as Zola defined it was short-lived and Ibsen's thematic flirtation with the movement probably peaked with *Ghosts* where his treatment of the themes of adultery, alcoholism, incest and syphilis caused outrage across Europe. The unfavourable reaction only fortified Ibsen's reputation as a social iconoclast – the label obtained after an equally adverse reception of *A Doll's House* two years prior. As theatre scholar Claude Schumacher notes in his study of theatrical naturalism and symbolism, to 'hostile critics [...] Ibsen was the epitome of everything that was bad in naturalism, the quintessence of decadence, of bad taste, of immorality.'<sup>279</sup> A similar critical assessment befell other naturalistic authors,

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>279</sup> Claude Schumacher ed., *Naturalism and Symbolism in European Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4.

notably the Swedish writer August Strindberg. Twenty years Ibsen's junior, Strindberg, who modelled much of his early work on the Norwegian dramatist, faced a trial for heresy following the publication of a collection of short stories titled *Getting Married* (1884) where he depicted the struggle between the sexes through the theme of matrimony – as the title suggests.

In the Foreword to his arguably most influential play, *Miss Julie* (1888), Strindberg provided a manifesto of naturalism that in many ways surpassed Zola's. He underlined the important task of examining complex psychological motivations that govern human behaviour, claiming that the development of the character should be the movement's central artistic stipulation:

I do not believe, therefore, in simple characters on the stage. And the summary judgments of the author upon men – this one stupid, and that one brutal, this one jealous, and that one stingy – should be challenged by the naturalists, who know the fertility of the soul-complex, and who realise that “vice” has a reverse very much resembling virtue. Because they are modern characters, living in a period of transition more hysterically hurried than its immediate predecessor at least, I have made my figures vacillating, out of joint, torn between the old and the new. [...] My souls (or characters) are conglomerates, made up of past and present stages of civilisation, scraps of humanity, torn-off pieces of Sunday clothing turned into rags – all patched together as is the human soul itself.<sup>280</sup>

Strindberg's definition of the naturalistic character finds ample resonance in Ibsen's oeuvre. As much as his introduction to *Miss Julie* elucidates the detailed construction of the play's main protagonists it, in essence, encapsulates a host of Ibsen's dramatic heroes that preceded Strindberg's own. From Nora, to Mrs Alving in *Ghosts*, Dr Stockman in *An Enemy*

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<sup>280</sup> August Strindberg, *Miss Julie*, transl. Edwin Bjorkman (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1992), xii.

*of the People* (1882) and Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm* (1886), Ibsen created psychologically layered individuals with no single dominant trait but capable of displaying a range of moods and emotional states. Both Scandinavian authors, although Ibsen may have been even more diligent in this sense, imagined their naturalistic characters down to the final detail – the mannerisms, the attire, minutest movements across the set as a way of deepening the drama. By focusing not merely on the characters' dialogue but also on their gestures, their corporeal vocabulary, Ibsen demonstrated a profound understanding of the potency of theatrical illusion and the manifold ways it can be achieved.

By way of example – in the opening sequence of *A Doll's House*, Nora's generous gratuity to the porter who helps her into the house with the abundance of parcels she has bought and her childlike enjoyment of macaroons, which she promptly puts away as her husband enters the room, effectively act as preliminary signals of her immaturity. The ensuing (verbal) exchanges with Torvald duly confirm this impression and the psychological journey from this point to her prominent exit at the very end of the play denotes a truly modernist dramatic transformation. In *The Wild Duck* Ibsen chooses a slightly different approach in an equally gainful way. The physical actions that he prescribes to the character of Gina, the wife of Hjalmar Ekdal, constitute a prominent visual motif: throughout the play, she performs a series of domestic chores – sewing, laying the table, tidying up – while the conversations between other characters run apace. Her attentive upkeep of the home and her pragmatic stance are a counterpoint to the sedentariness and flawed idealism of her husband, formulating an ideological gap into which the young and innocent Hedvig gets caught and is ultimately unable to bridge, leading to her tragic death. These dramaturgical procedures indicate Ibsen's awareness of the visual potential of the theatre art as a way of supporting the (verbal) unfolding of the plot. They contribute in equal measure to the distinct and consistently applied qualities of the author's signature poetics: the sharp characterisation, the efficient maintaining of suspense and the creation of nuanced human relationships. As I show later, these strategies are also the key components of Ibsen's examination of the performativity of home.

Crucial to the integrity of the artistic vision in Ibsen's prose oeuvre is another form of consistency: the continual recourse to the domestic setting as the locus of the drama. Save for a minority of scenes spanning the entire oeuvre, the action of Ibsen's plays is enclosed by the bourgeois interior – a faithfully exact reproduction of domestic material culture intended to create the illusion of reality. In their study of Ibsen in performance, theatre historians Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, chroniclers of the Scandinavian theatrical traditions in particular, argue that 'allegiance to material reality [is] indisputably rooted [...] in Ibsen's own conception of theatre'<sup>281</sup> but the emergence of this feature of naturalistic drama and in the theatre generally may be traced to over a hundred years earlier, to mid-eighteenth century France. In particular, the work of the renowned philosopher Denis Diderot serves as a forerunner to naturalism's project of truthful representation of material reality on stage. Although some of Diderot's views on the art were in conformity with the constrictive artistic principles of Enlightenment – for example, he believed that art should provide moral instruction as was the common expectation at the time – his ideas about the theatre's mediating resources, the ways in which it visually transmits its messages, suggested radical reform.

Diderot's calls for a greater degree of realism in the stage set arrangements, the use of everyday speech and natural movement of the actors indicate a theatre visionary. They evoke the notion of verisimilitude, the demand for believability of the characters' actions and their representation on stage. This theatrical concept, which dates back to Aristotle, signified – albeit in a modified form (attuned to the artistic needs of the era) – a vital concern for the dramatists of the Enlightenment period. As Marvin Carlson writes, Diderot's unique contribution to the theoretical discourse on the theatre of the time was that 'observed reality [should act] as the basis of verisimilitude.'<sup>282</sup> This offered a bold re-focusing of the theatrical experience as Diderot placed the emphasis on its visual aspect which included the

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<sup>281</sup> Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker, *Ibsen's Lively Art: A Performance Study of the Major Plays* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), 75-6.

<sup>282</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 154.

material composition of the imagined settings as well as suggestions on how actors should acknowledge each other's presence on stage (rather than vehemently declaim their lines frontally facing the auditorium), and construct a relationship between their characters that is consistent with the demands of the world of the play.

In a study of nineteenth-century art in England, theatre scholar Martin Meisel acknowledges the revolutionary impact of Diderot's ideas and asserts that his insistence on the visual in the theatre establishes him as the 'true prophet of the nineteenth-century pictorial drama'<sup>283</sup>, pointing also to the philosopher's influential essay "Conversations on *The Natural Son*," which accompanied the eponymous play, as a particularly cogent articulation of his ideas. In this work, Diderot introduced to the theatre the term *tableau*, the visual counterpoint to the then widely-spread dramaturgical concept of the *coup de théâtre*, defined by Pavis as 'the unexpected incident that occurs in the course of an action and [...] suddenly changes the status of the characters.'<sup>284</sup> A *tableau* denotes the aesthetic arrangement, the physical positioning of the characters on stage and, to again refer to Pavis, constitutes 'a spatial unit of atmosphere, milieu or period [as well as a] thematic unit.'<sup>285</sup> Diderot believed that the power of the stage image was equivalent to the propulsions of the plot and that the application of the *tableau* was eminently suited to his newly conceived theatrical genre, *la drame*, which would serve as a sort of midway point between comedy and tragedy, and 'would depict the passions and circumstances of everyday domestic life.'<sup>286</sup> The theatre that Diderot envisioned was, then, not to be dominated by the principles of dramatic narrative alone – the spatial composition of actors on stage could offer equal stimulation or pleasure for the eye. Diderot's theory clearly anticipates the naturalist movement and Ibsen's drama of the drawing room although it initially received scant attention from his contemporaries and had little bearing on the theatre of the late-eighteenth

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<sup>283</sup> Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 41.

<sup>284</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, trans. Christine Schantz (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 83.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>286</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 154.

century Europe. A notable exception to this was the emerging (and aforementioned) genre of melodrama which, as Toril Moi has highlighted, ‘would pick up the idea of making theater visually spectacular, not as Diderot surely would have wished, instead of, but in addition to plots of sudden reversals and recognitions.’<sup>287</sup>

The ascendancy of bourgeois melodrama coincided with the technological advancement in stage craft, characterised by the evermore elaborate sets, lavish costumes and increasingly frequent sound and lighting effects that accompanied the predictable chain of events and the commonly over-the-top characters. As the nineteenth century wore on, these technical developments made a prominent contribution to the establishment of new aesthetic norms in the theatre: by the 1840s professional productions – of melodrama as well as other theatrical forms – were relying less and less on painted scenery; real objects were used as props and three-dimensional sets (in the case of domestic settings this meant actual pieces of furniture) were becoming a regular occurrence on stages across Europe. These changes, of which Ibsen had very good knowledge in his roles as stage manager and director, eventually fused with the post-Romantic ideology of realism espoused in the theatre, as we have seen, by such theorists as Hettner and practised by dramatists like Dumas *filis*. Thematic realism – the socially engaged study of the problems of everyday life – met aesthetic realism, the demand for impartial and materially faithful transmission of those very struggles, setting the scene for the likes of Zola, Ibsen and Strindberg, and later Gerhart Hauptmann, Maxim Gorky as well as Anton Chekhov.

The visual idiom that naturalism eventually adopted at the close of the nineteenth century had, therefore, been in moderate but consistent development for decades, initially by way of Diderot’s ideas and then progressively through melodrama, the advances in the technology of stage craft and the rise of realism. The crucial naturalist modification of this idiom was the unwavering insistence on detailed, photographically accurate representation of material reality intended to heighten the theatrical illusion. To depict the imagined

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<sup>287</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), 114.

theatrical worlds, some creators of the naturalistic theatre would go to great lengths: directors of Ibsen would often insist on making the prescribed domestic interiors exact replicas of a Norwegian abode with all its typical features and on occasion even the author himself would be consulted to ensure the required authenticity. Yet no sooner did the coupling of perceived decadence and meticulous detail usher in the naturalistic movement than its ideology began to be challenged by other emerging artistic currents such as symbolism, expressionism and later futurism and surrealism.

## Part II

### Building Block 1: Overcoming the ‘Tyranny of Furniture’

One of the earliest and sternest opponents of naturalism was Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold who warned that the insistence on creating the illusion of reality ‘denies not only the spectator’s ability to imagine for himself but his ability to understand clever conversation.’<sup>288</sup> Audiences absorbing the naturalistic aesthetic, Meyerhold maintained, are cajoled into a mental passivity and to ensure their active emotional participation – or in other words, to avoid dramatists like Ibsen whose work is ‘drawn-out and doctrinaire’<sup>289</sup> – theatre should take to non-illusionistic staging techniques and diminish the supremacy of the medium of text in favour of other devices. Meyerhold was an important influence on the German playwright Bertolt Brecht whose leftist political theatre, although fully text-based, took a step further by proposing the audience’s conscious detachment from the imagined world of the play, the alienation effect, as a way of encouraging them to form their own moral judgement over a witnessed theatrical act. The resulting critical stance would inform their future actions in “real” life, ultimately enabling a personal as well as wider social transformation. In a manner akin to his fellow reformist

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<sup>288</sup> Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. Edward Braun (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 1998), 27.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

from Russia, Brecht described Ibsen's theatre as an 'incubus of habits',<sup>290</sup> adding that the 'sensations, insights and motivations'<sup>291</sup> his characters undergo 'are forced upon us so we learn no more [...] about the society'<sup>292</sup> from these plays. Brecht's is a didactic theatre that, like Meyerhold's, wants to break up the naturalistic illusion in the scenic as well as the psychological sense. For both artists naturalism is a genre of the past – uninspiring and ill-suited to the twentieth century.

Today's theatre no longer pursues the pseudoscientific examination of the world quite in the manner so passionately argued by Emile Zola. However, despite its criticisms, the naturalistic *style* of theatrical representation remains, over a hundred and thirty years after its controversial inception, very much a part of the contemporary dramaturgical vocabulary. This, one could contend, is to some degree sustained by the impact of film and television where the dominance of the naturalistic idiom has been practically unrivalled and has ensured that its ideology continues to serve as a constitutive component of culture. In contrast, the work of Henrik Ibsen does not appear to hold such sway over the socio-cultural dispositions of our time. His notoriety as the subversive dramatist of the late-nineteenth century dissolved shortly after his demise. Erich Auerbach, the renowned German scholar of literature, attributed this decline to 'the complete transformation of the social status of the bourgeoisie since 1914,'<sup>293</sup> concluding that Ibsen's plays have 'lost their timeliness [thus allowing us to] better see how calculated and contrived his art often is.'<sup>294</sup> Auerbach's assessment echoes the sentiments of compatriot critic Theodor Adorno, member of the Frankfurt School, an important critical theory group of twentieth-century thinkers, who noted the view of Ibsen as 'old-fashioned and outdated.'<sup>295</sup>

This outcome should be read in the context of the gradually evolving paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism – the work of Brecht, Meyerhold and Adorno was

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<sup>290</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., eds. Marc Silberman, Steve Giles, Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 239.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 520.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 92.



variously “caught” in the contested cultural expanse of this transition and inspired the generation that followed towards a new conception of the theatre. The interpretation of Ibsen as rigid and tedious appeared to seal his plays off in a temporally-bound vacuum of the nineteenth-century aesthetics it originated from. The critic Richard Gilman, the author of *The Making of Modern Drama* (1974), disapprovingly observed that ‘[o]ur habit of looking at Ibsen not as an artist but as a sort of [...] designer of problematic living rooms, a theatrical upholsterer, has prevented us from seeing how in his plays specific ideas or issues conceal truer, more permanent subjects’<sup>296</sup> – a view shared by the Scandinavian studies scholar Einar Haugen, for whom the impression of Ibsen as ‘the dramatist of the overstuffed, and indeed, stuffy [...] drawing rooms’<sup>297</sup> suggested a crude simplification.

The negative association of Ibsen’s prose plays with home furnishings has also been discussed by Toril Moi who has pointed to the critic Michael Billington’s assessment of unimaginative stagings of Ibsen in the 1950s and onwards.<sup>298</sup> Writing in the *Guardian*, Billington suggests that the way in which theatre directors approached Ibsen in the age when authors like Brecht or Beckett were at the forefront, all too often resembled the remark made of the atmosphere in Ibsen’s dramas by the English director Tyrone Guthrie. He characterized it as one in which ‘[h]igh thinking takes place in a world of dark-crimson serge tablecloths with chenille hobbles, black horsehair sofas, wall brackets and huge intellectual women in raincoats and rubbers.’<sup>299</sup> However, at the turn of the millennium, Billington proclaims in the same article that the era of ‘bad, old Ibsen stagings’<sup>300</sup> has passed: ‘today a whole host of directors have freed us from the tyranny of furniture and shown us that Ibsen can be spare, ironic, witty and sexy.’<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Richard Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 63.

<sup>297</sup> Einar Haugen, *Ibsen’s Drama: Author to Audience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 56.

<sup>298</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>299</sup> Tyrone Guthrie, *A Life in the Theatre* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), 53.

<sup>300</sup> Michael Billington “The Troll in the Drawing Room.” *Guardian*, February 15, 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/feb/15/theatre.artsfeatures>

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

Amid the polemics, the sofas, bookcases, cushioned footrests, hanging lamps and thick carpets that furnish Ibsen's theatrical worlds became the unfortunate benchmark of his artistic standing. I want to probe into this negative preoccupation with Ibsen's use of furniture by inverting the argument and inquire whether the domestic interior might constitute a subject in its own right – one that is not oppressive or stifling to imagination but, to the contrary, worthy of closer dramaturgical examination. A useful vantage point for investigating the significance of the domestic in Ibsen's works is Bert O. States' insightful study of theatre through phenomenology, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (1985). In the book, States explores 'the sensory basis of scenic illusion'<sup>302</sup> and notes that the mid-nineteenth century's introduction of furniture on the stage presented a 'shock not only for the audiences but for the [theatrical] medium itself which [...] stumbled upon something with an unknown potential.'<sup>303</sup> Furniture distinctively reconfigured the 'placeless and timeless world of classical tragedy'<sup>304</sup> and as realistic theatre proffered a more static theatrical experience, a lessening of the spatial flow of dramatic action, it indicated a substantial redefinition of how spectatorial sensibilities, that is, audiences' affective capacities are shaped.

Realistic theatre's 'single most important property,'<sup>305</sup> States writes, is 'the chair.'<sup>306</sup> By means of the chair 'the stage picture ceases to be a construct of language,'<sup>307</sup> allowing for 'conversation: causal or exploratory talk leading to tension and crisis.'<sup>308</sup> The chair, then, is crucial to the unfolding of the plot: it delineates the dramatic space as well as the relationships between the characters and, above all, their psychological predilections. The chair clarifies and propels the action. According to Canadian architectural theorist Witold Rybczynski, the invention of the chair represents the advent of a historical shift in the perception of inhabited spaces.

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<sup>302</sup> Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of the Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 50.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

[Chairs] affected the development of furniture in general, for without chairs, there would be no need for tables and desks, and little likelihood that [people] would want to surround themselves with other upright furniture such as cupboards, commodes, and bookcases.<sup>309</sup>

Rybczynski's contention enables us to expand States' dramaturgical reading of the chair in the view of the object's momentous role in the formation of the spatial units of dwelling, sites that have historically been conceived as shelters from the elements and associated with the creation of identity and the sense of self – homes. We may, therefore, posit that the chair's theatrical significance lies not only in enabling psychologically nuanced dramatic situations in densely populated theatrical worlds but also in its ability to reveal the home as the locus of an assorted range of patterns of habitation, domestic attitudes through which humans occupy and perceive their abodes. In other words, in realistic theatre the entity of the chair also gives prominence to the essentially un-dramatic, drawing attention to the everyday practices that take place in the sphere of the private.

Dissecting States' phenomenological conception of theatre realism through Rybczynski's perspective of architectural interior unlocks a distinctly affective register of dramaturgical interpretation. The correlation emerging between the realistic theatrical act and the individual witnessing it is one of increased emotional proximity in which the latter's space of habitation becomes the former's favoured setting and thematic concern. In this perceptual collision, drama formulates the home as its crucial constituent while also proposing that home, as a notion, should be reflected upon – a process that recalls Heidegger's postulation of the transportive experience of art through which one is invited to re-evaluate one's 'accustomed ties to the world'<sup>310</sup> and pursue a renewed understanding of it.

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<sup>309</sup> Witold Rybczynski, *Home: a Short History of an Idea* (London: Heinemann, 1988), 96.

<sup>310</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, transl. Albert Hofstadter (London: Routledge, 2010), 123.

It follows from this that the discursive tools of phenomenology enable us to contest the view that realistic theatre is ineffective in triggering spectatorial reflection. Its essential component, its (first) building block – the pieces of furniture that comprise a domestic setting – carries a distinct charge which initiates an affective contemplation premised on the immediacy of theatrical representation to everyday reality. Henrik Ibsen's naturalism, arguably one of the most accomplished modes of realistic theatre, develops this closeness into what we might call a form of intimacy. The domestic behaviours Ibsen assigns to his characters represent acts that humans engage in as a means of continuously nurturing a sense of inhabitation, they instantiate its performative quality – the physical and psychological expressions of home. The “theatrical upholsterer” of “dull drawing rooms” reveals himself as the master(ful) builder of visually and sentiently captivating domestic theatre worlds.

### **Building Block 2: Domestic Dispositions in *A Doll's House***

If *Pillars of Society* indicated a turning point in Ibsen's career because it was his first realist play, then his second, *A Doll's House*, is an equally important milestone. Widely regarded as the beginning of the genre of modern drama, the spiritual awakening of Nora Helmer who consciously abandons her husband Torvald and a privileged life as mother and wife to ‘find out the truth about myself and about life’<sup>311</sup> remains through its central subject matter of gender inequality relevant to this day (as I look at more closely in Chapter Three). Examining a couple's marriage in ways that draw up their complex individual traits and open yet more complex questions about interpersonal relationships, Ibsen establishes the home as at once the micro- and macrocosm of human nature. As Frode Helland et al. note in their study of its global appeal as soon as the play emerged, it became ‘his passport to international fame’<sup>312</sup>, the first in the line of penetrating investigations into how people inhabit dwelling spaces and perceive themselves and the world through them. Thematically,

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<sup>311</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 99.

<sup>312</sup> Frode Helland et al., *A Global Doll's House: Ibsen and Distant Vision* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

*A Doll's House* decisively informs the rest of Ibsen's artistic journey: without exception, all subsequent plays revolve around interpersonal relationships within a familial setting which constitute the second building block of his transportive dramaturgy. Each successive play, however, extends the range of the author's examination of the human condition further and the notion of home, which he begins to explore here both as a physical space and a social construct, is located at the heart of his drama. Interplaying two components crucial to his dramaturgy, the materiality of the furniture and a number of forms of domestic comportment, Ibsen creates an absorbing account of everyday inhabitation and formulates it into a method that he then applies in new, persistently innovative ways as the oeuvre progresses.

The constitutive role of *A Doll's House* in Ibsen's prose oeuvre warrants a closer examination of how its envisaged domestic behaviours assist in shaping the dramatic structure. In an attempt to eschew the polemical readings of the work, the author notably declared that his 'task [in writing it] has been the description of humanity.'<sup>313</sup> Although this is in many ways an understatement in the view of the play's complexity, the intention of describing human behaviour can be considered as an invitation to reflect on aspects of the work on a more literal level. Focusing on how the characters inhabit the dwelling space, their relation to the people and objects that surround them and the negotiation of the "social norms" of the milieu they belong to, opens Ibsen's drama to the realm of the ordinary, the quotidian, and reveals the foundation of his dramaturgical processes. These emanate, unsurprisingly, from the carefully constructed setting, a premediated arrangement that will carry the force of the conflict as it unfolds. Ibsen constructs the material world of *A Doll's House* as follows:

A comfortably and tastefully, but not expensively furnished room. Backstage right a door leads to the hall; backstage left, another door to Helmer's study. Between these two doors stands a piano. In the middle of

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<sup>313</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Letters and Speeches*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (Clinton, Mass: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), 337.

the left-hand wall is a door, with a window downstage of it. Near the window, a round table with armchairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, slightly upstage, is a door; downstage of this, against the same wall, a stove lined with porcelain tiles, with a couple of armchairs and a rocking-chair in front of it. Between the stove and the side door is a small table. Engravings on the wall. A what-not with china and other bric-à-brac; a small bookcase with leather-bound books. A carpet on the floor; a fire in the stove. A winter day.<sup>314</sup>

The author's imagined stage picture is based on a precise distribution of objects and paraphernalia forming a domestic space. Not all of these items will participate in the action to the same extent, yet jointly they create a sense of material prosperity. An early addition to the arrangement will be a Christmas tree which Nora will have delivered in the very first scene as she enters from outside. It will complement the fire burning in the stove to highlight the sense of habitational contentedness (heightened further by the anticipation of seasonal festivities) to firmly establish the world of the play – an affluent family home in which the placement of its contents is a conscious attempt at expressing a decorative taste and a form of belonging.

The scenographic exposition that greets Nora's entrance is the same visual backdrop that, by the end of the play, bids her farewell. Ibsen's overriding dramaturgical effect is drama confined to a single space, imbuing the fixity of the pieces of furniture with the emotional intensity of private moments and interpersonal, familial dynamics. Out of this constellation the author extracts a fundamentally flawed union between two people who, through the surfacing of the past embodied in the conniving bank clerk Krogstad to which each has a different connection, come to realise that what they considered to be a happy marriage was, in fact, mere self-deception. The disintegration of their bond not only signifies

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<sup>314</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 23.

the end of the seemingly harmonious family life but a complete redefinition of the meaning of home.

*A Doll's House* is structured on discordant attitudes to the domestic environment and the inability to nurture a fulsome marital cohabitation. By way of restricting the play's action to the Helmers' drawing room, the locus of home becomes complicit in the drama, fused into the dramatic conflict and inseparable from the affective impact of the protagonists' dramatic trajectories. Ibsen achieves a fruitful coming together of the material and the psychological primarily by linking the movement of the characters to the pieces of furniture that he has carefully incorporated into his vision of the theatrical world. On Krogstad's call, early in Act One, to seek assurances from his manager-to-be Torvald about the clerical post at the bank, he is received by Nora who is noticeably startled by her creditor's sudden emergence. Ibsen's stage directions instruct that after pointing Krogstad to the husband's study, she '[n]ods indifferently as she closes the hall door behind him. Then she walks across the room and sees to the stove.'<sup>315</sup> Throughout the ensuing exchange with her visiting friend Mrs Linde, she busies herself with getting the fire going again – '[a]h now it's alight'<sup>316</sup> – after which she 'closes the door of the stove and moves the rocking-chair a little to one side,'<sup>317</sup> clearly unsettled by the encounter which (literally and metaphorically) had cast a chill over her.

Later in the first act, the fire in the stove becomes a prominent feature of the evolving conflict once more. While Torvald is out, Krogstad reappears and pressures Nora into acting on his behalf. Failing to recognise his wife's unease on return, Torvald '[s]its down in front of the stove'<sup>318</sup> and dismisses Nora's more or less veiled attempts to have Krogstad reinstated by excitedly pronouncing: 'Ah, how cosy and peaceful it is here!'<sup>319</sup> Torvald's expressed enjoyment of the home and his sense of comfort are diametrically opposed to Nora's anxious stirring of the logs that followed the brief, unpleasant encounter

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

with the calculating money lender. Through contrasting emotional and physical reactions of both protagonists to the same referents of dramatic tension – Krogstad and the stove – Ibsen transforms two seemingly insignificant domestic moments into a potent theatrical image and thus points to the spouses’ diverging habitational behaviours that will ultimately drift apart, beyond the point of reconciliation.

Nora’s predicament is shaped by another piece of furniture, arguably the object on which the drama turns most – the letter box. With no access to its insides, as only the ‘husband has the key,’<sup>320</sup> she is unable to intercept Krogstad’s indicting missive and effect a change in the course of the action. That she can only survey the letter box from the outside, underscores her subordinate role in the household as well as her powerlessness as a woman dependent on the benevolence of the governing rule of the opposite sex. Ibsen sets up a curious correlation between the protagonist and the domestic object by linking Nora’s restrictions as a wife and a woman to the similarly restricting shape of the letter box, the parallel highlighting the idea of the heroine’s spatial and intellectual confinement. This interrelation also operates on a larger scale – the domestic space as a whole: she dares not leave the house, first for fear of Krogstad’s plotting and later to keep Torvald away from collecting his post, thus becoming a captive in her own home. Completing this dramaturgical strategy, the play’s primary spatial convention of condensing dramatic action into a single room adds a further perceptual layer to the notion of entrapment, solidifying the motif as the prime illustration of the protagonist’s plight. (The theme will eventually be resolved with Nora’s shutting of the door in order to make the first steps towards her new self.)

An important dimension of Ibsen’s dramaturgy of the ordinary domestic is how the characters outside of Nora and Torvald’s relationship interact with their dwelling space. Dr Rank, ‘our best friend [who] looks us up at least once every day,’<sup>321</sup> in Nora’s words, is a trusted confidant of the Helmers. Suffering from what is most likely syphilis (‘My poor

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 32.



innocent spine must pay for the fun my father had as a gay young lieutenant.<sup>322</sup>), he leads a lonely life, often expressing suicidal tendencies, and appears to find solace in the frequent visits to the couple – as Nora sympathetically remarks to him: ‘I think you enjoy being with us, don’t you?’<sup>323</sup> It becomes quite evident, however, that the doctor harbours secret affection for Nora, even indulging in the thought that he could have taken Torvald’s place when he intimates to her: ‘I’d often felt you’d just as soon be with me as with Helmer.’<sup>324</sup> Seamlessly moving between conversations with Torvald in the study and exchanges with Nora in the parlour, Rank spends a lot of time seeking the comfort of friendly company as well as living out repressed fantasies in the space in which he is, in essence, merely a visitor. It remains somewhat unclear, however, whether he has detected the ruptures below the surface of their seemingly happy marriage. His final words when bidding good night on the fateful evening of Nora’s departure from the home (and perhaps his own from the world) resonate simultaneously as sincere and unwittingly predictive: ‘Ah, yes – these dear rooms, how well I know them. What a happy peaceful home you two have.’<sup>325</sup>

Christine Linde, another caller at the Helmer residence, is in some ways conceived as Doctor Rank’s analogy. Nora’s childhood friend returns to her home town after becoming an impoverished widow of a reckless businessman. Mrs Linde wants a new beginning and becomes instrumental in the disentanglement of Nora’s conflict with Nils Krogstad. In a melodramatic twist, she reminds the seemingly immoral official (whose heart she broke in their younger years when forced to wed a different man to secure her family’s financial stability) of their one-time romance, persuades him to marry her and give up the revengeful plot against the Helmers. The figure of Mrs Linde highlights how for women of the nineteenth and earlier centuries marriage commonly provided a means of ensuring a livelihood. The settling of the spousal arrangement was often akin to a business transaction which constituted home as more of an economic than a socially convivial unit. As literary

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 88.

scholar Carolyn Lambert writes of the nineteenth century – summarizing the discussion of Elsie Michie’s *The Vulgar Question of Money: Heiresses, Materialism, and the Novel of Manners from Jane Austen to Henry James* (2011) – ‘marriage was an essential part of the economic fabric, a form of exchange and accumulation, a secure foundation on which financial stability could be built in an increasingly unstable world.’<sup>326</sup>

In Ibsen’s prose plays the theme is perhaps most pronounced in *The Wild Duck* (as we shall see) but it is complicated by the fact that in the marriage between Gina and Hjalmar Ekdal, she is more accurately described as the provider through the benefactor (and ostensibly former partner) Hakkon Werle, while the idea of marriage as convenience can also be traced in Werle’s subplot with Mrs Soerby.<sup>327</sup> As for Christine Linde, she ends up regretting her decision to marry for security but turns it into a valuable life lesson. Significantly, she does not want Krogstad to recall his letter (which at this point is still waiting for Torvald in the letter box) as she believes that Nora’s secret should be made known to the husband: ‘[t]hey must come to a full understanding. There must be an end of all these shiftings and evasions.’<sup>328</sup> A happy home, in Mrs Linde’s view, is one founded on honesty and integrity and this is how she intends to build her new relationship with Krogstad. Her perception of home and Rank’s attitude to the Helmers’ abode act as powerful counterpoints to the deception that governs Nora and Torvald’s marriage; dramaturgically, both family friends are the portents of the imminent denouement.

The controlling figure of Torvald serves Ibsen as the pre-eminent device for interrogating the values of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. He is desperately sensitive to how he is perceived in the community and sports an inflated sense of self-importance. The impending appointment as bank manager is a matter of considerable prestige and also comes as a relief, for, according to Nora, the profession of barrister, which he is giving up, is ‘so uncertain, you know, especially if one isn’t prepared to touch any case that isn’t – well –

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<sup>326</sup> Carolyn Lambert, Introduction to *For Better, For Worse: Marriage in Victorian Novels by Women*, eds. Carolyn Lambert and Marion Shaw (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.

<sup>327</sup> It may be noted that debt, love and marriage are also interplayed in John Gabriel Borkman.

<sup>328</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll’s House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 84.

quite nice. And of course Torvald has been very firm about that<sup>329</sup>. Torvald's conception of home is, by his own admission, heavily informed by what he has experienced 'so often in my work at the bar.'<sup>330</sup> His misgivings about Krogstad stem from the man's alleged brush with crime at some point in the past when he is believed to have 'chose[n] to try and trick his way out of it'<sup>331</sup> to escape punishment for committing forgery. Torvald says:

[j]ust think how a man with that load on his conscience must always be lying and cheating and dissembling – how he must wear a mask in the presence of those dearest to him, even his own wife and children! [...] Because an atmosphere of lies contaminates and poisons every corner of the home. Every breath that the children draw in such a house contains the germs of evil.<sup>332</sup>

Torvald holds equally strong views on the subject of money, a common topic of discussion with his wife. Warning Nora against the pitfalls of a careless attitude to one's finances, he proclaims that 'a home that is founded on debts and borrowing can never be a place of freedom and beauty.'<sup>333</sup> For Torvald an honourable home is a moral duty and a lens through which he interprets undesirable social behaviours. Illicit acts not only corrupt the person committing them but also infect those around them – once planted, the seed of such depravity spreads interminably.

In his own abode, the principled husband expects nothing less than the prudence and restraint he exercises in his professional capacity. While he appears to be withdrawn from the daily life of the home – he repeatedly retires to his study, does not interact with the children and leaves Nora to oversee household chores – he maintains a commanding presence. As Nora willingly admits, she is happy to 'fill the house with pretty things, just as

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 25.

Torvald likes it<sup>334</sup> for he better ‘understands how to make a home look attractive.’<sup>335</sup> The husband governs the house with a territorial and intellectual authority, as well as a strong personal conviction about what constitutes a joyful and virtuous home. It is, however, a vision of glorification he is unable to uphold. The revelation of Nora’s debt uncovers his duplicitous character, exposing him as the mirror image of his own damning assessment of Krogstad, that is, the exact opposite of the ideals he has been expounding. Mindful of the consequences that Nora’s offence could have on his reputation, Torvald is adamant that the institution of their marriage should not be compromised.

The thing must be hushed up at any cost [and] we must appear to be living together just as before. Only *appear*, of course. You will continue to reside here. That is understood. But the children shall be taken out of your hands. I dare no longer entrust them to you still remain in my house. [...] Well, all that must be finished. Henceforth there can be no question of happiness; we must merely strive to save what shreds and tatters.<sup>336</sup>

Ibsen accentuates the properties (or expressions) that represent the building blocks of the notion of a respectable domestic life – the house, the children, marriage and happiness. Significantly, the latter becomes irrelevant and should be sacrificed for the husband’s continued good name. Unwilling to consider the reasons that led Nora to the precarious borrowing of the money, Torvald’s sole focus is the preservation of home as a social requirement, a mere formality, a compulsory supplement to a high-profile career to which the wife and children are the requisite appendage. To Nora, however, any kind of union with Torvald becomes an utter impossibility. She realises that she is no more than his

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 94.

invention, likens herself to the figure of a doll and, equating their home to a 'playroom',<sup>337</sup> exposes Torvald's insistence on false appearances as a sort of perverse theatrical ploy.

I mean, then I passed from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything the way you wanted it so that I simply took over your taste in everything – or pretended I did. [...] Now I look back on it, it's as if I've been living here like a pauper, from hand to mouth. I performed tricks for you, and you gave me food and drink. But that was how you wanted it. [...] But our home has never been anything but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as I used to be papa's doll-child.<sup>338</sup>

The juxtaposition of Torvald's moralistic evocation of home and Nora's image of the doll house, an imaginary, toy world, signifies the personal and social limitations that have shaped her predicament. Nora recognises that she inhabits a received space for which she lacks deeper intimate attachment; she feels the urge to renounce this sheltered life guided by intuition and 'must educate myself'.<sup>339</sup> Her cognitive transformation is profound and her resolve irrevocable. Moments before she shuts the door on her doll-like existence, in one of her final remarks to Torvald, she delivers a startling affirmation of their mutual estrangement from the domestic space, and consequently from each other, when she assures him that 'the servants know about everything to do with the house – much better than I do'<sup>340</sup> (and thus better than Torvald does as well), implying that household life will carry on uninterrupted by her absence. To the Helmers home is a perpetually elusive entity, unattainable through material means as well as (empty) declarations of its comfort and sanctity. Their only remaining hope for a "real" marriage, according to Ibsen, is an

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 103.

individual spiritual revolution and not an emotionally desolate cohabitation performed for the benefit of others.

The ways in which Nora and Torvald, both individually and as a “unit” experience their space of inhabitation, relate to its material culture, and how their abode is perceived by those closest to them, represent a key idea explored in this thesis: multiple expressions of home, the intentional as well as unconscious acts that operate at the core of one’s self, and shape one’s identity and world view. Of particular interest to Ibsen is what these habitational processes can bring to the structure of the dramatic conflict. In *A Doll’s House* he arrives at a conclusion that will have an extraordinary impact on the rest of his work and theatre art in general. The domestic dispositions of the Helmers become the principal mechanism for deepening and intensifying the conflict, that is, for making the drama *matter*. Strategically woven into the unfolding of the action, attitudes to home formulate the domestic into a concept that calls for critical reflection. In other words, by probing the patterns of inhabitation in *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen gives voice to the performative expressions of home, anchoring in the theatre the meaning of *being at* and *making home*.

### **After Nora: The Overflowing of Home**

From *A Doll’s House* stems twenty years of Ibsen’s writing, a total of ten dramatic works, with the investigation of home persisting throughout the author’s mature period. The longevity of the domestic in Ibsen’s drama is in itself a testament to the author’s foundational role in the theatrical examination of the performative expressions of home. The first four plays, that is, up to *Rosmersholm* in 1886, are set entirely indoors. Ibsen’s insistence on abundantly furnished fictional worlds in this powerful sequence which includes *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People* and *The Wild Duck*, may well have contributed to later perceptions of “stuffy” drawing rooms which dominated much of the twentieth-century criticism of his work. Perhaps the most enigmatic of Ibsen’s plays, *The Lady from the Sea* (1888) represents a break in the spatial consistency and, like his final drama *When We Dead Awaken*, takes place exclusively outdoors, but both retain the emphasis on familial life and

thus stay within the broader problematics of home. In *Hedda Gabler* (1890) Ibsen returns to the rigorously defined setting of the household while his late works, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf* (1894) and *John Gabriel Borkman*, although anchored in the realistic interior of the home, carry out a gradual dissolution of the exacting spatial arrangement of the domestic. However, as I will show, this process tentatively begins already with *Nora* and then progressively becomes more explicit as the oeuvre grows.

Conceptually, *A Doll's House* sets the tone for the rest of the oeuvre and Ibsen's imagined homes that follow in the mould of the Helmers' are typically caught in the dialectic of bourgeois material comfort and emotional, interpersonal desolation. The visually detailed interiors fail to foster psychological contentment, leaving their inhabitants unfulfilled and often fatalistically dejected. The homes they occupy invariably induce what theatre scholar Una Chaudhuri has called the 'geopathic disorders',<sup>341</sup> a major preoccupation of the genre of modern drama which signifies 'the suffering caused by one's location.'<sup>342</sup> Ibsen's characters are fundamentally displaced by how they experience their homes, that is, by the sense of self and the relationships with other inhabitants they develop. They feel these relationships are in some ways unsatisfactory but do not know how to overcome this insufficiency. The conflict they have to negotiate is inescapably shaped by their spatial or even geographical position. In it, they feel trapped and unable to work out a resolution.

According to Chaudhuri, this tension instantiates two governing principles of modern drama, 'a *victimage of location* and a *heroism of departure*.'<sup>343</sup> The conceptual foundation of these two figurations is the determining character of the genre herself – Nora Helmer. Her trajectory involves the successful conquering of the former which, in turn, enables the realisation of the latter. The spatial paradigm of modern drama is, therefore, 'both introduced and surpassed'<sup>344</sup> by *A Doll's House*. Nora's departure is a 'coupling of radical displacement with [...] a *future*, [...] a projection into the future. [...] Once Nora

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<sup>341</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

leaves, leaving and staying become central and defining for later characters<sup>345</sup>. As will fully emerge through the ensuing discussion, the “departures” of Ibsen’s characters are very often tragic and finite.

The hermetic confinement which Ibsen achieves in *A Doll’s House* by locating the action in the Helmers’ drawing room and highlighting Nora’s social and psychological entrapment within this world, concludes with her crossing of the doorstep as a radical transgression of the play’s initial dramaturgical premise. Therefore, in the final act of the play the fixity of the domestic architecture is superseded by a kineticism which reaches its peak at the point where Ibsen is no longer able to keep the drama from spilling out of its allocated perimeter. This bears a significant dramaturgical influence on the rest of the plays: although the works that follow *A Doll’s House* largely preserve the drawing room as the setting, Ibsen increasingly begins to look beyond the boundaries of the domestic to intensify the dramatic conflict. The incorporation of the outside world enables him to extend the definition of home beyond the readily available meaning of the domestic space and the inherent behavioural dispositions that are central to the unfolding of *A Doll’s House*.

In other words, after Nora’s departure Ibsen’s drama opens itself to a wider range of the performative expressions of home. From the early socially-engaged prose plays to the late drama which blends elements of realism with symbolism and increasingly poetic language, Ibsen’s domestic theatrical worlds are permeated with affective qualities of home-making and being at home – processes that are integral to how humans perceive themselves and their personal space, but also to how they establish ties with other humans and relations to other places. The prose plays abound in dramaturgical continuities through which accounts of domestic inhabitation are developed into meditations on human existence. These linkages are sustained by the performativities of home that often recur – inventively inflected, always in new ways – as the oeuvre progresses. They generate the *overflowing* of the meanings of home – drama packed with motifs that give rise to an affective returning to the primordial sentience of the processes of being at home and making a home.

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 62-63.



An intriguing set of threads connects four separate works that span the oeuvre – two that followed shortly after Ibsen’s transition to prose, *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, and two that came towards the end, *The Master Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. The late plays serve as thematic enhancements of their respective predecessors, conceptual extensions which expand the meaning of home as well as reinforce this entity as the fundamental component of Ibsen’s drama. *The Master Builder* re-works two particular expressions of home that are set out in *Ghosts*, that of the act of building (and the cognate trope of architecture) and the notion of homelessness. In *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman* the concept of home is examined through the characters’ relationships to the environment. The meaning of the domestic is amplified to the level of nature as the ultimate home of human beings. While *The Wild Duck* explores the individual’s primal connection to the wildlife of the great outdoors, *John Gabriel Borkman* revolves around the idea of the environment as a highly developed urban agglomeration – an efficient, prosperous as well as amiable and cooperative (yet imaginary) society.

### **Building Home(lessnes)s: the Alving and the Solnesses**

In *Ghosts* Ibsen comes closest to the naturalistic vision of theatre advocated by Emile Zola and breaks away from the melodramatic undertones that appeared in the two preceding prose works. Mrs Alving, a central figure of the play, is in some ways a continuation of Nora Helmer in that she questions the bourgeois narrow-mindedness with respect to the role of women in the family and in society. However, there is also an important difference between them. As Ibsen remarked in comparing both heroines, ‘after Nora, Mrs Alving of necessity had to come home,’<sup>346</sup> that is, that she is a Nora who thought of leaving her husband but never did. The widow of Captain Alving regrets that she married a man who turned out to be a debauched alcoholic and whose indiscretions she had to conceal before others. When one night she gathered the courage to leave and sought advice from family friend Pastor Manders he condemned her and led her, in his own words, ‘back

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<sup>346</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Letters and Speeches*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (Clinton, Mass: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), 208.

on to the path of duty and home<sup>347</sup> where she remained until the husband's death. As she recounts,

I endured much in this house. To keep him at home in the evenings – and at night – I had to make myself his companion in his secret dissipations up in his room. I had to sit alone with him, had to clink my glass with his and drink with him, listen to his obscene and senseless drivelling, had to fight him with my fists to haul him into bed. [...] I had to, for my little son's sake. [...] I thought that the child could not help but be poisoned merely by breathing in this tainted home. That was why I sent him away [and that was] why he was never allowed to set foot in this home while his father was alive.<sup>348</sup>

She soon discovers that her efforts to protect Oswald from his paternal ancestor's influence were in vain. He returns from Paris terminally ill, suffering from a hereditary venereal disease. The place that should represent a home for Captain Alving's wife and child emerges as a site of estrangement: her alienation stems from a loveless marriage and the husband's depraved behaviour, his from having grown up away from the family and, as Manders points out, 'never [having] had the opportunity to know what a real home is like.'<sup>349</sup> Ibsen juxtaposes this psychological condition with the play's central event, the construction of the orphanage on the family estate which is being erected in the late Alving's honour. The Pastor wants for the building to 'be consecrated to a higher purpose [...] to serve the town as well [as to] considerably ease the burden of the ratepayers in respect of the poor.'<sup>350</sup> To Mrs Alving, however, the endeavour has a deeper personal significance. She has invested in it her husband's endowment with the intention of eradicating the memory of him

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<sup>347</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 50.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

and to ensure that ‘that money [does not] come into Oswald’s hands [for] he shall inherit everything from me.’<sup>351</sup> The funding of the project is a way of purging herself of the past; it is a long deferred act of breaking free which, she is futilely convinced, will also liberate her son.

The fire that destroys the orphanage on the eve of the opening ceremony leaves her strangely unmoved, underlining that her desire for reaching personal closure is greater than her belief in the good cause of the undertaking. Ibsen confronts two forms of homelessness, that of the Alvings who have lived in the absence of heartfelt familial cohabitation and that of the (unseen) socially underprivileged for whom the charitable institution would typically provide shelter. These divergent accretions of the same trope denote two performative expressions, distinct ways through which we experience home: its emotional value and its material significance. As they come together, they constitute a third – the act of (home) building, represented in the play by the construction project.

In his study of dramatists from the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, theorist Raymond Williams asserts that the orphanage ‘is a statement of the total situation of the drama,’<sup>352</sup> the symbol of the family’s dysfunction and of their inability to create a home. The orphanage is a signifier of loss and frustration, initially for Helen Alving and her son, but after the destructive fire for the other characters as well. Regina, the maid, finds out that she is old Alving’s illegitimate child but as she has been brought up as a servant in (what should have been) her own home, her opportunities in life will forever remain limited. She leaves the estate, her seemingly only option to earn a living being to join the wayward carpenter Engstrand (also her foster parent) who plans to start a home for sailors which, as Mark B. Sandberg has noted, ‘is quite clearly a euphemistic description of a brothel’.<sup>353</sup> Thus, Regina’s life prospects look decidedly bleak and she is likely to suffer the consequences of her father’s debaucheries in the same way that Oswald has.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>352</sup> Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), 53.

<sup>353</sup> Mark B. Sandberg: *Ibsen’s Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 90.

Pastor Manders departs, appalled by the revelations about the Captain's life but also with a sense of shame, fearing the fire may have been caused by a moment of his own recklessness. What contributes to his distress is the waning influence of the Word of God in the household at the expense of Mrs Alving's interest in secular, liberally-inclined literature and her indifference to what she calls the 'ghosts [...] so horribly afraid of the light'<sup>354</sup> by which she means the Pastor's moralistic teachings and conformist views. His parting remark is a cry of hope – 'may the spirit of law and order soon enter into this house'<sup>355</sup> but it is quite conceivably his final act of guidance to the family.

The figure of the light is an important motif in the play, second only to the orphanage, and designed around Ibsen's inventive use of the setting. *Ghosts* takes place in a 'spacious garden room [that] opens out into a slightly narrower conservatory, with walls of large panes of glass [through which] a gloomy fjord landscape is discernible.'<sup>356</sup> This arrangement allows for the visual incorporation of the outer world without interrupting the flow of the action but still decisively shaping it. While the architectural structure of the orphanage is never seen on stage, the blaze that rages through it, as Israeli theatre scholar Freddie Rokem has noted, is displayed 'at the focal point of the visual perspective'<sup>357</sup> through the large windows of the conservatory, centre stage. The light from the fire momentarily dispels the darkness in the home of which Oswald persistently complains and delivers the sense of brightness which, his mother concedes, 'I didn't bring into [the] home'<sup>358</sup> while the husband was still alive. As day breaks, the glow of the fire is replaced by the radiance of the rising sun which spills into the home through the glass panes but arrives too late to alter Oswald's mood as he succumbs to a syphilitic seizure.

Ibsen's integration of the outdoors into the conflict is both conceptually and spatially in the service of illuminating the primary source of the drama – the broken family

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<sup>354</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 62.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>357</sup> Freddie Rokem, *Theatrical Space in Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg: Public Forms of Privacy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), 18.

<sup>358</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 89.

home. He draws a dramaturgical parallel between the Alving abode and the orphanage to reinforce the emotional destitution of a materially comfortable household. The home in *Ghosts* is conceived through the notion of homelessness as a firmly ingrained human condition rather than a consequence of poverty. The building of what is meant to be a nurturing refuge only deepens the family's plight, highlighting that the sense of being at home for the mother and her child is unattainable.

Over a decade after *Ghosts* Ibsen revisited the performative expressions of homelessness and building in *The Master Builder*. Its protagonist Halvard Solness runs a successful architectural practice but, due to a lack of formal training, refers to himself as master builder. He has earned a reputation for constructing churches and steeples guided by unique vision and intuition, enabling him to establish a prosperous business venture. In his mature years, Solness appears unsettled and contemplative, increasingly haunted by the fear that the younger generation will take his place. Having abandoned raising towers, he instead builds '[h]omes for people to live in,'<sup>359</sup> however, 'to be able to build homes for other people, I had to renounce for ever all hope of having a home of my own.'<sup>360</sup>

Like many marriages of Ibsen's prose oeuvre, that of the Solnesses' too is unfulfilled. The source of the spouses' alienation is a disastrous fire that some years before destroyed their previous home and caused the death of their babies. The wife has never recovered from the tragedy and lives a withdrawn domestic existence amid empty rooms that were intended for their children, tending to her lady-of-the-house duties but drifting further and further apart from her husband who appears equally unable to mend the relationship. On Solness the fire had the opposite effect. He was, in his own words, 'fanned by those flames. I cut up nearly all the grounds [of the family estate] into building plots. And *there* I was able to build, just the way I wanted. And from then on things went well for me.'<sup>361</sup> Among his proudest achievements was the construction of a church tower in a neighbouring district

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 285.

where he made a particular impression on a local girl Hilde whom he, ostensibly in jest, promised to make a princess and buy a kingdom.

Now a spirited young woman, Hilde turns up on Solness' doorstep unannounced, requesting he honour his pledge of ten years. She becomes the household guest and her presence intensifies Solness' brooding state. The mixture of seductiveness, manipulation and naivety in her demeanour awakens 'the troll'<sup>362</sup> in the master builder, the invisible demon that possesses the mind and clouds judgement. He decides to climb to the top of the tower of his newly-built home and hang the wreath to mark its successful completion – just like Hilde recalls him doing at the ceremony in her village. Spurred by her encouragement and the townsfolk assembled to witness his ascent, his effort ends with a plunge into death.

The themes of homelessness and building in the play extend across three divergent but interconnected dramaturgical planes which correspond to three kinds of relationships that Solness develops with those who surround him. The first denotes the act of building in its literal sense and involves his associates – the architect Brovik and his son Ragnar, a draughtsman. The father wants to convince the master builder to endorse Ragnar's drawings for an ambitious project which would enable his son to make a name for himself and eventually establish his own practice. Solness recognises Ragnar's talent but is too proud to acknowledge it and initially dismisses his designs for a new client, a young couple, by saying: 'I know the sort. They'll take anything with four walls and a roof over it. Anywhere to lay their heads. That's not what I call a home.'<sup>363</sup> Asked to reconsider, Solness becomes more irritated and responds in no uncertain terms that he 'shall never give way. [...] Not of my own free-will,'<sup>364</sup> but later under Hilde's influence appears to submit to mysterious inner powers and changes his mind.

The play's second dramaturgical plane concerns Solness' relationship with his wife Aline and their affective relation to home. Since the tragic fire, she has been reclusive and frail, filled with self-reproach, believing that her babies died because she did not sufficiently

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 250.

fulfil her duty as a mother. Solness struggles with the feeling of guilt towards her – as he claims, Aline ‘destroyed and annihilated’<sup>365</sup> her calling in life so that he could pursue his. Her talent was a different kind of building, namely, the building of the ‘souls of children. So that they might grow into something noble, harmonious and beautiful [but] it lies there unused – and unusable, waste and barren, like the charred ruins left after a fire.’<sup>366</sup> The pair’s estrangement is not caused so much by lack of affection as by the inability to deal with the ramifications of the tragedy and support each other. Their marriage signifies a form of emotional rupture which, as frequently evinced in Ibsen’s drama, cannot be overcome by the enjoyment of the material comfort of the domestic space. Solness has built a new house for them, promising that life will be better there, to which Aline only indifferently replies ‘[y]ou can build as much as you like, Halvard – you’ll never be able to build a real home for me again.’<sup>367</sup> The admired maker of homes emerges as an emotively homeless individual.

It is in Solness’ bond with the young Hilde that the play’s third dramaturgical plane is located. The girl’s arrival marks the start of a volatile interpersonal dynamic. Although they are of different generations and barely know each other, their conversation acquires an unusually intimate tone and a sensuous resonance after only a few exchanges:

Solness: [...] I suppose you must be very tired.

Hilde: Not me! I’ll sleep all right, though. I think it’s absolutely marvellous to lie in bed and dream.

Solness: Do you often dream at night?

Hilde: Gosh, yes. Nearly every night.

Solness: What do you mostly dream about?

Hilde: I shan’t tell you tonight. Some other time – perhaps.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 263.

Weighed down by the pressure from the Broviks on one side and the strained relationship with his wife on the other, Solness finds in Hilde an outlet for his unrest. He reveals his fears and frustrations to her without inhibition and is spellbound by her youthful exuberance. She begins to influence his thoughts and gradually assumes command of them – first by convincing him that a decade ago he made romantic advances towards her and kissed her ‘[m]any, many times’<sup>369</sup> and later by convincing him to approve Ragnar’s drawings. As a consequence, the master builder claims that it is no longer possible for him to be with his wife as ‘demons [have] sucked her blood [and] I am chained to a corpse,’<sup>370</sup> and declares that he is to abandon his calling. In this way Hilde absolves Solness of the burden of everyday reality and urges him to transcend its confines. She asks him to build her a castle for her kingdom but it is to be ‘a castle in the air [and is to stand] on a true foundation’<sup>371</sup> of their mutual understanding. The infatuated Solness follows the young temptress into her fantasy and renounces that which brought him prominence – the churches he erected in the ‘honour and glory’<sup>372</sup> of God and the ‘homes [he built] for people to live in.’<sup>373</sup> From now, he ‘shall build [in] the only place where [...] happiness can exist [...] together with a princess, whom I love. [...] The princess shall have her castle. [...] Our castle in the air.’<sup>374</sup> Drawn to celestial heights, the master builder falls off the scaffolding and leaves behind another home that will remain empty and desolate.

Commonly regarded as Ibsen’s most intensely personal work, the figurative density of *The Master Builder* lends itself to a range of interpretations. Whether the biographical reading of the Solnesses’ marriage as Ibsen’s own relationship with his wife and of Hilde as an analogy of the author’s romantic involvement with younger women enrich our understanding of the play is questionable and the impression that the play functions as a reassessment of the setting and subject of home – the perpetual preoccupation in his prose oeuvre – is more compelling. In carrying out this revision, Ibsen interplays the founding

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 316.



elements of his drama: the painstaking precision of the domestic spatial arrangements and the dynamics of familial inhabitation. He leans heavily on the conceptual premise of *Ghosts* and accentuates the themes of building and psychological homelessness (as well as the intervening dramaturgical symbolism of the fire), conjoining them in the figure of Solness – a man who passionately pursues the perfecting of the former only to intimately endure the bleakness of the latter.

Although their motives differ, Mrs Alving and Halvard Solness both build in an attempt to overcome and do away with the difficult memories of the past. However, while she harbours no particular feelings for the orphanage and accepts its burning down with indifference, his calling as the master builder, the designated creator of living spaces (as opposed to benefactor) besets his predicament with an intensified sense of dislodgement. *The Master Builder* is the most explicit representation of the dialectic of house and home, that is, the incapacity of architecture to bestow a congenial domestic inhabitation – the struggle that Ibsen, in various ways, investigates throughout the prose oeuvre. At the same time, it is a work that marks Ibsen's distancing from the social realism of his early prose pieces. Rather than being socially engaged, *The Master Builder* advances an intuitive perception of home and signifies the desire to grasp the essence of the human urge to inhabit, advancing a phenomenological perspective.

In the figure of Solness, Ibsen straddles the oppositional dichotomy of house and home, the challenge that Martin Heidegger will take up when remarking on the housing shortage in the derelict, post-war Europe. Much like Solness, Heidegger inquires whether 'houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?'<sup>375</sup> He looks for the answer in the faculty of language and suggests that the words dwelling and building have the same lexical origin, leading him to propose that building and dwelling should not be considered as two separate entities but as one notion since building has dwelling 'as its

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<sup>375</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstater (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 146.

goal.<sup>376</sup> Solness' response to this question, which he arrives at with the guiding (and fateful) hand of Hilde, and upholds the conclusion Ibsen had reached already in *Ghosts*, is that building 'homes for people isn't worth twopence [because] people have no use for the homes they live in. They can't be happy in them.'<sup>377</sup>

In as much as this is a reflection of an embittered individual who has grown weary of the world, it may read, on another level, as a retrospective assessment of a prolific author for whom home serves as a crucial element of the drama. The inference of the futility of creating a home appears to resonate in each of Ibsen's fictional abodes from *A Doll's House* onwards as well as to anticipate the two "domestic" pieces that were to follow in *Little Eyolf* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. We might conclude, therefore, that the struggle of making (a) home and the burden of psychological homelessness is Mrs Alving's, Solness' and perhaps Ibsen's alike.

### **Haunt and Habitat: the Ekdals and the Borkmans**

Equally powerful as the discord between the idea of homelessness and the act of building in Ibsen is the dynamic between the domestic setting and the spaces beyond its walls. It is perceptively examined in *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman*,<sup>378</sup> two works that, much like *Ghosts* and *The Master Builder*, are separated by more than a decade. As with the plays in the preceding section, the subjects explored are interrelated on several levels and at the heart of their imbrication lies the figure of home as the formative element of personal identity and interpersonal relationships. While the commonalities between both plays reinforce the notion of home as Ibsen's central thematic concern, the treatment of the tension between the domestic and the outdoors or, as I propose, between haunts and habitats, from one play to the other demonstrates the author's gradual widening of the meaning of home and new shadings of the concept's performative expression.

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>377</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 315.

<sup>378</sup> The theme is, of course, also present in *The Enemy of the People* which precedes *The Wild Duck* by a year but is less occupied with the affective dimension of the domestic which characterises the plays that are the particular focus of this thesis.

*The Wild Duck* intertwines the stories of two families, the Ekdals and the Werles, connected through their ageing fathers who were once joint proprietors of large expanses of forests until their sawmill enterprise came in conflict with the law. Old Ekdal was convicted of unlawful tree cutting and had to serve a prison sentence while Hakkon Werle was acquitted and carried on the profitable venture. The events of the play are set almost two decades later and are, with the exception of Act I, located in the humble but relatively spacious attic dwelling of Ekdal's son Hjalmar. The home also serves as a place of work where Hjalmar and his wife Gina run a photographic studio. Completing the household are their daughter Hedvig and the old Lieutenant, a reclusive and somewhat jaded figure who spends most of his time in the loft, an unfurnished room that has been converted into a wildlife environment of sorts and houses dried up Christmas trees, chickens, rabbits, pigeons and, of course, a wild duck.

Many scholarly discussions have speculated on the play's multifaceted symbolism of the duck as well as the loft and some interpretations of the latter will be dealt with below. As for the wild duck, it comes into the family after being shot by old Werle during a hunting expedition. To save it from death, Ekdal shelters the bird in the loft where it begins to recover and feel increasingly at home – as Hjalmar says, 'she's been in there for so long now that she's forgotten what it's like to live the life she was born for.'<sup>379</sup> Michael Meyer has established a twofold symbolic reading:

Firstly, it is, like Hedvig, a by-product of Haakon Werle's fondness for sport which has been rejected by him and is now cared for by the Ekdal family. Secondly, with a more general application, it represents the refusal of most people, once they have been wounded, to go on living and face reality.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 152.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

The Ekdal family life is disrupted by the arrival of Hjalmar's boyhood friend Gregers Werle who lives in his father's forests in Hoydal and returns after an absence of seventeen years. The history of the contrasting fortunes of both households begins to emerge through Gregers' profoundly misjudged insistence on revisiting the past. Amid assertions that 'traps were laid'<sup>381</sup> for old Ekdal during the business partnership with Werle, it is revealed that Hjalmar's career path and marriage, too, were of old Werle's design – primarily to conceal his affair with Gina, the outcome of which appears to have been the birth of Hedvig. These revelations wound Hjalmar's pride as it becomes clear that it has not been his photographic work but rather old Werle's financial support that has kept the family going all these years – he renounces his daughter and decides to leave the home. Upset by his actions, Hedvig is consoled by the hapless Gregers whose advice confounds her further: her life ends tragically as she (mis)uses old Ekdal's gun while, unbeknownst to other family members, looking in on the beloved wild duck in the mysterious space of the loft.

The play's performative expressions of home draw from – and develop – the dramaturgical elements central to two of its predecessors, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts* respectively. The characters' domestic behaviours and the spatial configuration of the abode open anew the themes of home-making and of being at home. The cohabitation of Hjalmar and Gina Ekdal bears some resemblance to the interpersonal dynamic of the Helmers but also diverges from it in ways that indicate the evolvement of Ibsen's awareness of the theatrical potential of the domestic patterns of inhabitation. Hjalmar shares Torvald's penchant for affected declarations of blissful domesticity but whereas Nora's husband can enjoy the comfort of the home with a sense of accomplishment for having created a cherished sanctuary of his own, Hjalmar's high-sounding words hold very little substance. Although he considers himself the breadwinner of the family, his contribution to its welfare is scarce. He makes a point of priding himself on being a hard worker – 'I'll work as long as there's strength in these arms'<sup>382</sup> – and deludedly believes in masterminding an invention

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 143.

that will restore the family's good name but is prone to procrastination and distracts himself pottering about in the loft where he and his father are building a makeshift forest.

The burden of keeping the household afloat falls on the indefatigable and pragmatic Gina who, with the help of Hedvig, carries out all the chores, looks after the finances, and even covers portrait sittings as such appointments are beneath Hjalmar who, she says, 'isn't just an ordinary photographer.'<sup>383</sup> Both Hedvig and Gina recognise Hjalmar's frequent mood swings and his excessive self-centredness yet both appear to unconditionally accept his conduct and neither interprets it as detrimental to the family's prosperity. Hjalmar has been scarred by his father's downfall and has adopted the view of himself as a victim, developing a heightened sense of self-importance as a sort of defence mechanism, a way of coping with the harsh reality of his predicament. The consequence of this is, in Toril Moi's phrase, his 'rejection of the everyday,'<sup>384</sup> a sheer indifference to the struggles that a poor family endures to make ends meet. The marriage to Gina has only exacerbated this disposition of refusal further – his sense of domesticity is a form of inert domestication. In it, Hjalmar is only feeding, as his neighbour Dr Relling puts it, his own 'life-lie,'<sup>385</sup> in avoidance of being a true provider for the family, actively pursuing a more achievable goal.

A complete opposite of her husband, Gina is grounded and very closely attached to the space of inhabitation. Her modest background has fortified her with resilience, she takes nothing for granted and everything she accomplishes is a result of her own initiative. Her devotion to the family is expressed through her diligent housework but her effort, however, is undermined by the emotionally homeless Gregers, another in a series of Ibsen's characters who have experienced a ruptured home. Much like old Werle ruined his peer Ekdal so his son brings destruction to the next generation of the Ekdal family. Gina, the selfless maker of the home, is dispossessed not only of its affective value but also of its future. Hedvig's death signifies the demise of the Ekdal household, establishing Gina's tragedy as greater than that

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>384</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 254.

<sup>385</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Henrik Ibsen, Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 202.

which befalls Solness, for she actually achieves what Solness could only aspire to: to create a domestic sphere where ‘mothers and fathers could live with their children [and] belong to each other – in great things and small.’<sup>386</sup> Gina’s loss is arguably Ibsen’s most poignant representation of the disintegration or even impossibility of a family home.

*The Wild Duck* is structured on a string of spatial oppositions between two households. Ibsen situates the first act in the ‘expensive and comfortably furnished’<sup>387</sup> study of Haakon Werle’s residence, illuminated by ‘lamps with green shades [that] throw a soft light’<sup>388</sup> behind which is ‘a large and elegant dining room, brilliantly lit by lamps and candelabra.’<sup>389</sup> The dinner party in the honour of Gregers’ homecoming makes Hjalmar an unexpected guest – out of place, not used to such lavish surroundings and ill-equipped to join in the repartee. When later in the play less distinguished company assembles for a meal at the Ekdal home, they are entertained in Hjalmar’s photographic studio which includes

a sloping ceiling containing large panes of glass [...] half-covered by a blue curtain [and] a sofa with a table and some chairs. [...] In the corner by the stove is an old armchair. Here and there, various pieces of photographic apparatus, [...] a bookcase containing some books, boxes, bottles containing chemicals, various tools, instruments and other objects.<sup>390</sup>

The stark contrast between these interiors serves as an indicator of the different social conditions of the two families. This is further ingrained into the dramatic conflict by the presentation of the two events: the dinner at the Werles’ is served by waiters, it includes several dishes (listed on a menu), and the occasion is rounded off by a glass of Tokay. The lunch organised by the Ekdals, another welcoming of sorts for Gregers who has arranged to lodge in the household’s spare room after a row with his father, is a rather more humble

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 285, 286.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 135.

affair. Gregers has been invited by Hjalmar along with their neighbours, Dr Relling and Molvik, to what would normally be the family lunch. Gina and Hedvig, who have prepared herring salad, inadvertently adopt the role of the waiters while the fine wine is replaced by cheap spirits and beer. The unexpected guest at this gathering happens to be the host of the festive celebration from the beginning of the play, namely, old Werle himself who comes to seek reconciliation with his estranged son.

The naturalistic accuracy which sets up the visual divide between the two homes is framed within a broader locational or rather geographical disparity that has shaped the families' fates – the vastness of the Hoydal forests. It is from this remote region that Gregers returns and where, at the end of the play, old Werle retires to with his new wife. For old Ekdal, however, who, as Gregers puts it, 'has always been drawn to a life that is wild and free,'<sup>391</sup> the wide expanses are no longer attainable so the loft brings back some of the freedom he used to enjoy. Una Chaudhuri has rejected the symbolist interpretations of the loft, suggesting that it should be read as a representation 'of wilderness, [...] a reproduction, a copy, [...] not a symbolic but a *symptomatic* space, in which, as in the modern world itself, the categories of nature and artifice collide and distort each other.'<sup>392</sup> Chaudhuri sees in the loft a sort of forerunner of the 'simulated worlds of contemporary mass entertainment – the theme parks, world showcases, safari parks [and] tropical shopping plazas.'<sup>393</sup> These products, she concludes, are a consequence of 'capitalist exploitation [that] requires that nature be artificially reproduced, preserved, and displayed'<sup>394</sup>; they are a distortion of reality and they ultimately indicate a distancing of humans from the primordial elements of being.

From this ecological and multi-scalar perspective, the loft is foregrounded as a component of a larger system, that is, the ecosystem. Ibsen's integration of the natural habitat into an architectural unit of habitation signifies the positioning of the domestic within the wider geographical scale, as if to say that the space of home can only be understood in

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>392</sup> Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 76.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 78.

relation to the spaces beyond its confines. Thus a way of conceiving of the dramatic conflict in *The Wild Duck* is to situate it between the individual and the environment. Old Ekdal's attempt to capture the enormity of the great outdoors into a small room is not a symbolic substitute for (or evocation of) the unavailable vastness of the Hoydal forest, but an act of surrender to the nature's infinite supremacy over the individual. The loft, his beloved haunt, is the already (and deliberately) 'thinned out'<sup>395</sup> forest of which Gregers tells the Lieutenant in Act 2 when they reminisce about Hoydal. The old man's response is a word of caution: 'That's dangerous. Bad things'll come of that. The forest'll have its revenge.'<sup>396</sup> And indeed it does after Gregers convinces Hedvig to sacrifice the wild duck, 'the most precious of your possessions,'<sup>397</sup> to win back her father's affection and she takes her own life. Old Ekdal's prophecy has been fulfilled – when the child is pronounced dead the future tense becomes the present – the forest, he mutters, 'has taken its revenge.'<sup>398</sup> The play delivers the conviction that nature governs humanity; our primary home is the environment we inhabit, the home of the domestic space is, so to speak, of secondary order. Hedvig's death is the outcome of a comprehensive and drawn-out rupture between the natural habitat and the built environment. The ecological strife started with old Ekdal's illegal tree cutting and Haakon Werle's greed and eventually resulted in the Lieutenant's seclusion to the loft, Gregers' years of isolation, and Hjalmar's withdrawal from the everyday – this indicates a range of displacements that have disrupted the balance between the two poles of the outdoors and the domestic.

As Ibsen's career was drawing to a close, Ekdal's loft, the haunt of his declining years, received a dramaturgical elaboration of sorts through the account of the solitary domestic existence of John Gabriel Borkman, the central figure of the eponymous work, the author's second-to-last. There is more than a touch of the old Lieutenant in Borkman who was once a man of influence, but committed a wrongdoing and ended up behind bars. A

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<sup>395</sup> Henrik Ibsen, Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 148.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.



visionary banker and a proud man of '[d]istinguished appearance,'<sup>399</sup> Borkman entered into speculative investments with a desire to 'create a kingdom for myself, and prosperity for thousands and thousands of others.'<sup>400</sup> His consuming passion, however, ended in a financial crash, throwing a great many people into destitution and after he served his sentence, Borkman cut himself off from the world in the family home – a mansion on the outskirts of the capital, part of his wife Gunhild's family estate.

Borkman's solitude is prefigured by the estrangement from his spouse. While Mrs Borkman inhabits the ground floor of their once glorious residence which is now showing signs of 'faded splendour,'<sup>401</sup> he occupies the level above but does not descend to spend time with her, nor does he ever leave the abode. As Gunhild remarks, '[s]ometimes – late at night – I hear him come down to put [his cape and hat] on and go out. But he always stops halfway down the stairs – and turns – and goes back to his room.'<sup>402</sup> There are few visitors to the soulless home of the Borkmans. Even their only son Erhart finds it 'suffocating in this house'<sup>403</sup> and prefers to live in the town. He feels stifled by his mother's insistence that he should 'right all the wrongs his father did'<sup>404</sup> and dedicate himself, as we find time and again in Ibsen, to the mission of restoring the family's good name. He is particularly alienated from his father whose only contacts with the outer world are childhood friend Wilhelm Foldal and his daughter Frida, a talented musician whom Erhart has engaged to play the piano for John Gabriel's occasional entertainment.

Borkman's isolation to his haunt – the mansion's grand drawing room which, one would imagine, is where guests were once lavishly received but has lost its lustre of magnificence over the years – is filled with brooding over the past and illusory hopes for the future. He tirelessly rehearses the grand designs of the millions he could have generated and which would have transformed the world had his financial ventures not been terminated

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<sup>399</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Four: Pillars of Society, John Gabriel Borkman, When We Dead Awaken*, trans. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 153.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

prematurely – as he believes. Although dejected, he is patiently waiting for, in his own words to Foldal, the

‘day I am rehabilitated – when they realise they cannot do without me – when they come up to me in this room and get down on their knees and implore me to take over control of the bank again – the new bank they have founded – but cannot run. [...] I am sure of it. Absolutely certain – that they will come, [...] I expect them any day, any hour. And as you see, I hold myself perpetually in readiness to receive them.’<sup>405</sup>

The banker’s seclusion comes to an end when he is visited by Ella Rentheim, his wife’s twin sister but also his former lover. Revealing that she is terminally ill, Ella wants to be reunited with Erhart whom she took under her wing as a child. This meets with Gunhild’s disapproval and when Erhart is confronted with the choice of staying by the parents’ side or living with his aunt, he opts for a solution neither of the women had foreseen – to leave the family altogether and join his companion Mrs Wilton, a wealthy divorcee and benefactor of Frida Foldal, in travelling abroad where the aspiring pianist is to receive a music education. The son’s departure from home sparks Borkman’s suppressed longing to return ‘into the storm of life’<sup>406</sup> and for the first time in sixteen years he steps out into the open air. Indifferent to the cold of the winter night, he can no longer be persuaded to return inside. He embraces the exposure to the elements and rejects the comfort of domestic habitation: ‘If I were to go up to that room now, the walls and ceiling would shrink and crush me, crush me like a fly.’<sup>407</sup> He ventures into the forest, followed by Ella, and as they reach a clearing, a vast landscape opens below them. Resting his eyes on the distant fjord and the surrounding mountain peaks, the vision he so passionately believed in until it was

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 196.

squashed by the financial collapse he provoked, his ‘country of dreams,’<sup>408</sup> reveals itself to him for the final time:

Can you see the smoke from the great steamers out on the fjord? [...] They come and go. They create a sense of fellowship throughout the world. They bring light and warmth to the hearts of men in many thousands of homes. That is what I dreamed of creating. [...] Down there by the river, the factories hum. The night shifts are working. They work both night and day [...] but these are only the outworks surrounding my kingdom. [...] The kingdom I was about to take possession of, [...] there it lies, defenceless, masterless, abandoned.<sup>409</sup>

By breaking out of the domestic enclosure, Borkman achieves what old Ekdal had renounced when imprisonment shattered his strength of will – a unity with the outdoors. Whereas the Lieutenant cultivated a primordial connection to the forest, Borkman develops a refined vision of a society that functions impeccably, prospering through a globalised economy and enterprises that work around the clock. In this efficiency-driven world there is also room for scores of contented, peaceful homes, possibly even for the Helmers, the Alvings, the Ekdals and the Solnesses – as well as young Erhart. Out of Borkman the ruthless banker, surfaces Borkman the idealistic politician, a figure that fuses a capitalist mindset with a social(ist) sensibility and foresees a new world order. The ‘lust for power’<sup>410</sup> that motivated his financial appetite transforms into a politically-contrived conception of a community forming a disciplined and harmonious habitat that demands to be protected and cared for (for it is ‘defenceless’ and ‘abandoned’) to flourish and create a feeling of home.

As he outlines this master plan, and in some ways a striking anticipation of the twenty-first century, Borkman’s fervour fades. The might of the visionary politician seeps

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 198-9.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 170.

away and the natural world that he had earlier embraced as the ultimate human expression of home proves to be equally unforgiving towards him as it was to the Ekdals. In contrast to the innocent Hedvig who was deprived of a future on account of the wrongs committed by others, Borkman pays the price for his own transgressions. A primal instinct awakens in him and the ‘wounded eagle,’<sup>411</sup> as he describes himself to Foldal – an image that invites a correlation to Lieutenant’s duck – passes away as if to suggest that his dream was utopian and, much like his financial exploits, destined to fail. His final ascent through the forest signifies a dying animal’s retreat. As in *The Wild Duck*, so too in this play, nature prevails: Borkman’s vision of the world as well as his rudimentary, animalistic urge are utterly defeated. Having relinquished the family home, he is, in the end, also robbed of the comfort of nature. Neither haunts nor habitats can accommodate his being.

While the works discussed in this section share the dominant ecological motif of the humans’ relationship with nature, Ibsen’s last but one play also exhibits a dramaturgical convergence with *A Doll’s House* through Erhart’s unexpected departure from the family. Less socially resonant than Nora’s leaving, the son’s separation from the parents complements its early dramaturgical predecessor as it represents the completion – the rounding off – of Ibsen’s preoccupation with home that spans nearly two decades. Like Nora, Erhart was sheltered throughout his formative years by his aunt and mother but now recognises that the affection he received was in part a reflection of their rivalry. Ella considers him her own son:

I must have my child again, before I go. It’s so hateful for me to think that I must lose everything [...] without leaving behind me a single person who will remember me and love me and be sad that I have gone – the way a son remembers a mother he has lost.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 173-4.

Ella wants Erhart for herself to which Gunhild retorts that ‘he’ll always be mine,’<sup>413</sup> but both have failed to detect the growing influence of the liberally-minded Fanny Wilton on him. As the siblings vie for Erhart’s attention, they do not recognise that he has matured and has come to understand the stifling family tensions. Reminiscent of Nora’s justification to part with Torvald, Erhart, too, wants to become his own person, ‘stand on my own feet [...] have a will of my own [and] live, live, live.’<sup>414</sup> This enthusiastic evocation of future is a counterpoint to the ageing as well as ailing Borkmans and Ella Rentheim. The young couple and their protégée Frida Foldal are adventurers in the hunt for new experiences. In opposition to the trio of elders who are bitter and forlorn figures, they are full of hope, uninhibited and willing to defy social or any other limitations.

Their departure is a celebration of personal freedom and proposes a bold reconceptualization of the idea of home – manifested persuasively in the way Mrs Wilton responds to Gunhild’s question whether the couple ‘are being wise in taking a young girl’<sup>415</sup> with them:

Mrs Wilton: Men are so unpredictable, Mrs Borkman. And women too. When Erhart is tired of me, and I of him, it will be good for both of us that he should have someone to fall back on, poor boy.

Mrs Borkman: And what will you do?

Mrs Wilton: Oh, I shall manage, I promise you. Goodbye, everybody!<sup>416</sup>

The lovers’ perceptive view of the union between two people as potentially impermanent and their unconventional attitude towards the institution of the family home bring a renewed sense of relevance to Nora’s desire for personal liberation. As Nora recognises her entrapment within the domestic enclosure and Torvald’s constricting

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 183-4.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

definition of home, she sees the disintegration of marriage; however, she is unable to articulate quite how their differences might be overcome. She says that ‘the miracle of miracles would have to happen’<sup>417</sup> but adds that she has lost the belief that such things can actually occur. Fanny Wilton’s awareness of the unpredictability of interpersonal relationships conveys the sort of lucidity and self-assurance that Nora lacks. Her words suggest the collapse of the traditional conception of home and in a way serve as the long-awaited resolution of Nora’s daring and uncertain stride towards the future.

### **Part III**

#### **Naturalistic Theatre and the Figurative Transportation Denied**

The plays examined throughout the second part of this chapter generate an overflowing of the performativities of home – multiple elicitations of the notion of inhabitation which initiate the affective returning to the sentience of being at and making home. The combined workings of the carefully devised domestic settings and the human behaviours that surface within them open the drama to themes like (emotional) homelessness, the act of building and the relationship between the domestic and the environment. These inflections of home, as I have argued, inventively bring into the dramatic conflict the world beyond its designated locus; however, the process of dramaturgical extension only serves to recast the thematic emphasis on the very site from which the drama emanates – the household. This outcome enables what Raymond Williams in his writings on realism describes as ‘the room as the centre of the reality of human action.’<sup>418</sup>

Ibsen’s prose oeuvre invites a persistent psychological returning to the awareness of inhabitation. This reflective transportation is a synthesis of a myriad of processes, spanning ordinary moments of the everyday as well as emotional capacities which animate one’s innermost recesses of being. To follow Heidegger and examine oneself through the

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<sup>417</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll’s House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 104.

<sup>418</sup> Raymond Williams, “A Lecture on Realism,” *Screen* Vol. 18, Issue 1 (1977), 66.

experience of art is to re-draw the borders of one's cognition, to avail oneself to new knowledge and understanding. It signifies the possibility of revisiting one's views and beliefs and intensifies one's perceptiveness to the surrounding world. In Ibsen's theatre the vehicle for the experiential transfer from the fictional to the personal is the entity of home. It is, at the same time, the affective journey's ultimate destination – the point to which the inner transformation is directed (or gravitates) towards.

Recalling a production of *The Wild Duck*, George Bernard Shaw depicted the impact as 'getting deeper and deeper into the Ekdal home, and getting deeper and deeper into your own life all the time [which culminated] in an experience deeper than real life ever brings to most men, or often brings to any man.'<sup>419</sup> Shaw was one of Ibsen's most fervent supporters in Victorian England. If his experience represents what we might call a "productive" instance of Heideggerian returning, it is important to note that the transportive process can yield other reactions too and we can point to a contrasting example that would have been known to Shaw himself. The London premiere of *A Doll's House* in June, 1889 – a whole decade after publication – predominantly attracted harsh criticism and even where more conciliatory tones were employed, the disinclination towards the author was apparent. The critic Clement Scott, writing for *The Daily Telegraph*, was in no doubt that the audiences would condemn the ideas Ibsen had put forward: 'We do not honestly believe that those theories as expressed in "The Doll's House" would ever find favour with the great body of English playgoers.'<sup>420</sup>

What these responses demonstrate is that in revealing behavioural patterns that would have typically been expected to remain concealed from public view, Ibsen hit a particularly sore spot of bourgeois sensitivities. As intensely private behaviours became the subject of the collective gathering of the theatre, they pierced through the carefully arranged interiors on stage and unsettled the patrons' expectations. Thus what we see in the above

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<sup>419</sup> Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: Volume 1, 1856-1898: The Search for Love* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 199.

<sup>420</sup> Unsigned notice by Clement Scott, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 June, 1889 quoted in Michael Egan, *Ibsen: the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 102.

reviews of the portrayal of Nora and Torvald's domestic habitation is a restraint towards (allowing oneself) the affective returning home. The process creates an unwelcome consequence, a cause of spectatorial discomfort. According to literary scholar Alan Ackerman, this kind of reception was typical of Ibsen's Victorian audiences which 'applauded the innovative [...] representation of private, middle-class life among "real objects," [but] did not favour the explanation of complex moral and psychological truths within those walls.'<sup>421</sup>

Studying the reception of Ibsen by Scandinavian audiences, Mark B. Sandberg points to a case of a Swedish writer who in response to *A Doll's House* recorded that it leaves one 'compelled to defend one's own house and home. It has been us he has attacked – our customs, our views, our society.'<sup>422</sup> As Sandberg notes, in eliciting such responses, 'Ibsen can be seen as reversing the semantic field of some of the most intuitive, commonly accepted architectural notions [...] which had been left mostly unchallenged by previous writers, especially in Norway, so that when he began his relentless counterintuitive revision [of the understanding of home] the protest and discomfort were almost immediate and reflexive.'<sup>423</sup> Ibsen's representation of home in *Ghosts* where, for example, Oswald talks to Pastor Manders about couples in Paris who have children live together but are not married, caused, Sandberg adds later, 'instinctive reactions'<sup>424</sup> of outrage which reminds us of the hold of the philosophical doctrine of idealism in the public life and opinion of the nineteenth century. Toril Moi suggests that the shock prompted by *Ghosts* is emblematic of idealism's becoming 'virtually identical with hypocritical, anti-artist, moralistic conservatism.'<sup>425</sup>

The unease of bourgeois audiences may have been exacerbated by the configuration of the theatrical event. Susan Bennett's description of the spectatorial experience, in her

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<sup>421</sup> Alan Ackerman, "Theatre and the Private Sphere in the Fiction of Louisa May Alcott" in *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, ed. Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 163.

<sup>422</sup> Mark B. Sandberg, *Ibsen's Houses: Architectural Metaphor and the Modern Uncanny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>425</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93.



illuminating study *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), in the traditional format of the proscenium arch theatre reveals a set of clearly defined social as well as physical conditions of the encounter located in an

auditorium which assures anonymity [...] translated by theatre audiences into a psychological need [allowing] the spectator [...] his own well-marked private space, individual seat, and relative immunity from physical contact with his fellows (and even from seeing them). The result [of this is] personal rather than social perception [which is] hardly surprising [given] the value accorded to the individual and his/her privacy in bourgeois culture.<sup>426</sup>

This contention opens up the possibility of a more complex ideological underpinning of the encounter with Ibsen's realism. In his study of modern drama, William Worthen proposes that in garnering privacy the realistic theatre merely highlights the social privilege of its patrons whose ability for 'empathy and understanding'<sup>427</sup> is undercut by the authors' 'sentimentalizing'<sup>428</sup> of the drama's characters. This leads to the 'concealment of agency'<sup>429</sup>, putting spectators into the position of 'detached observers'<sup>430</sup>, their engagement with the problems of the world of the play operating only 'across a paralysing distance'<sup>431</sup>. In Worthen's reading, *The Wild Duck* is emblematic of the 'kind of [emotional] prison.'<sup>432</sup>

Worthen's implication of audience passivity receives a powerful refraction in Elin Diamond's gender analysis of the effects of the nineteenth-century realism. Her argument centres on the acknowledgement that the intended truthful representation of a contemporary moment always stems from the social conditions of that moment's evolvment. In this way,

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<sup>426</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 133.

<sup>427</sup> William Worthen, *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 24.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 25.

the world is both ‘the source and the guarantor of knowledge’<sup>433</sup> and in the case of the female audiences in Ibsen’s time – the period of the growing suffrage movement – this means that such representation only reinforces the patriarchal world order. Examining the period’s psychological discourse and the then emerging doctrine of psychoanalysis, Diamond proposes that the structure of the woman’s experience of that world is inescapably one of subordination and marginalisation in which the male-dominated dictum reduces the women’s identification with characters like Nora or Hedda Gabler to a form of hysteria.

Worthen’s and Diamond’s accounts of historical spectatorial engagement with the conceit of realistic representation point to why Ibsen’s construction of, for example, the Helmers’ marriage – though seemingly ideally set up to offer an intimate experience of affective returning – was met with criticism. In this sense the theatre can be seen as assisting in the preservation of the social norms rather than seriously challenging them, though it clearly did attempt to interrogate them. Returning to Alan Ackerman’s remark of the Victorians’ duplicity and lack of willingness to engage with more complex questions in light of Worthen’s and Diamond’s contributions, the transportive experience through Ibsen’s drama strikes us as problematic due to the various social pressures associated with the prevalent mindset of the time which discouraged opportunities for an individual’s personal re-evaluation in the theatre. To a contemporary audience, with the distance of over a century, Ibsen’s realism has a different meaning and, in understanding its ideological bent, we can draw on a wide range of historical, cultural as well as aesthetic interpretations. At the time of his writing, however, the painstaking pursuit of accurate representation of imagined theatre worlds produced a kind of paradoxical outcome: the rejection of the process of affective transportation because the real-ness of the everyday as conveyed through the principles of naturalism on stage was at variance with the class-induced social norms and audience expectations.

With its emphasis on the search of self-realisation and the discrete, individuated experience in the proscenium arch theatre, Ibsen’s drama enters into the individual’s sphere

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<sup>433</sup> Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.

of intimacy in a previously unprecedented manner. He reveals the affective value of the material world of domestic furniture and also establishes the habitational behaviours of domesticity as well as the conflated tropes of comfort and privacy as autonomous theatrical entities, exposing a range of emotions. Although these are in possession of individual characters who pursue them through their own dramaturgical trajectories, the substance of their affective states forms part of collective awareness, resonating with the recognizable features of the experience of everyday life.

### **Overcoming the Limitations of the Genre**

Ibsen's extending of the meanings of home – a central preoccupation of the prose plays – simultaneously represents his questioning of the limitations of realistic theatre and the imagining of the theatrical possibilities beyond its conventions. His exploration of the boundaries of the genre develops in a chronological order by way of the unfolding of the crucial components of his questioning of home – starting with Nora's departure, through to the visual representation of the orphanage in *Ghosts*, the Ekdals' loft, Solness' ill-fated homes and castles in the air and, finally, the breaking away from the domestic enclosure and the visions of a new world order in *John Gabriel Borkman*. These dramaturgical elements demonstrate Ibsen's continuing awareness of the spatial restrictions imposed by the principles of naturalistic representation and a curiosity about how to overcome them. What binds the five works into a cohesive (spatial) unit is that their respective courses of dramatic action commence in the domestic interior and, in disparate ways, negotiate their way out of it.<sup>434</sup>

The process involves the gradual fragmentation of physical architecture, that is to say, it reframes the emphasis on the fixity inherent to the material (domestic) worlds of naturalism into a locational elasticity which anticipates the loosening and revisioning of the theatrical medium that fully evolves from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. While Ibsen has not been traditionally regarded as the forerunner to these innovative artistic

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<sup>434</sup> As noted earlier, not all of Ibsen's prose plays take place exclusively indoors.

tendencies – the period’s arguably most prolific experimental figure in the field was August Strindberg – his scepticism of the theatrical methods of realism and naturalism indicates a dramatist fully awake to the permanently shifting ground of artistic inquiry. Indeed, Ibsen’s mid-career transition to writing drama in prose is a case in point.

Nora’s departure serves, as we have seen, as a condemnation of the bourgeois conception of marriage. The dramatic effect produced by the play’s ending is, however, significantly determined by the single theatrical setting of the family home which the heroine demonstratively walks away from. It is possible to argue that parallel to the richly layered treatment of the trope of home – what we might refer to as the thematic level – there exists an equally important spatial level of Ibsen’s examination of home in the prose oeuvre. In this sense, the final scene of *A Doll’s House* functions as a metatheatrical comment on the restrictive architectonic ideology of realism – a comment that, in modification, persists through to *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*.

As Nora closes the door, the principal dramaturgical conclusion created by her exit is that the conflict has outgrown the drawing room and that the spreading of the drama beyond the interior is inevitable. The configuration of the setting in *Ghosts* clearly shows how Ibsen puts this inference under more pressure. He spreads the spatial dramatic axis to a second(ary) architectural unit – the orphanage – which does not form part of the action as a material entity but its dramaturgical presence is constant and signified most perceptibly by means of the fire raging in the distance. This produces a new spatial dynamic in which the bourgeois parlour remains the central locus of the action – the primary unit – but its subordinate counterpart serves as the physically absent catalyst of dramatic tension. In other words, the drama is shaped through the relationship between two architectural structures and, as we saw, neither building fulfils the essential inhabitational function of sheltering human existence.

What is to *Ghosts* the edifice of the orphanage is to *The Wild Duck* the enigmatic space of the loft. Similarly concealed from view for the majority of the action, the loft makes two brief appearances, first in the night-time when the Ekdals consecrate the visiting

Gregers Werle into their secret little forest world and later during the day as Hjalmar and his father deliberate on improvements for its animal residents. Ibsen describes the loft as ‘irregularly-shaped [...] full of dark nooks and crannies, and with a couple of brick chimney-pipes coming through the floor.’<sup>435</sup> Although architecturally enclosed, the space is entirely exposed to the cycle of natural light. In the night, Ibsen tells us, through the ‘small skylights bright moonlight shines on the various parts of the loft, while the rest lies in shadow’<sup>436</sup> in the day, as ‘the sun is shining in, [some] pigeons [can be seen] flying back and forth, while others perch, cooing, on the rafters.’<sup>437</sup>

In *Ghosts* the spatial relations are organised around the use of the large conservatory windows of the dwelling which allow sight of the surrounding landscape to ensure the coexistence of two dramatic sites. In *The Wild Duck* this approach is replaced by a much more explicit representation of the outer world – the integration of the outdoors directly into the family abode. This collision of the natural and the built environment takes Ibsen’s probing of the limitations of the naturalistic genre a step further. That the confined architectural space of the loft should shelter a wildlife habitat comes across as a dramaturgically incommensurable, if not absurd, expectation. What makes the idea sustainable, however, is that the spatial concept is skilfully woven into the psychological construction of the characters through the notion of the financial as well as geographical loss that has marked the Ekdals since the Lieutenant’s downfall. The nuanced portrayal of the inner life of Hjalmar and his father justifies the prevailing of naturalism’s architectonic principle of the domestic enclosure over the imposing force of the boundless outdoors, enabling the accommodation of the dramatic conflict within the walls of the Ekdal household.

The sequence comprising Nora’s shutting of her family home’s front door, the newly-built and then suddenly burnt down orphanage which serves as the source of dramatic

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<sup>435</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 135.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

friction in *Ghosts*, and the make-believe forest of the Ekdals formulates a progressive escalation of the problem of the physical restrictions of the naturalistic genre. Temporarily setting the question aside, Ibsen then resurrects it in *The Master Builder*. As I have argued earlier, the play's plot encompasses three dramaturgical planes which concern the profession of building, Solness' relationship to his wife, and his bond with the young Hilde respectively. The spatial organisation of the play's three acts mirrors these three strata: the first act takes place in Solness' 'plainly furnished office'<sup>438</sup> (and begins with a work-related discussion) while the second is based in the 'pleasantly furnished little sitting-room'<sup>439</sup> (and revolves around the spouses' disintegrating marriage).

The final act opens to a magnificent outdoor tableau: a 'large broad verandah',<sup>440</sup> flanked by a part of the master builder's house to the left and 'the lower part of [his] new villa with scaffolding round the base of the tower'<sup>441</sup> to the right. There are large old trees that 'stretch their branches over the verandah' and in the background there is a garden, 'bounded by an old fence,' while beyond 'is a street, with low, tumbledown cottages.'<sup>442</sup> This stage picture suggests a captivating visual definition of the protagonist's life – the setting is enveloped by the architectures of his current home and the one he has just built in the hope that it will bring him and his wife the hitherto elusive happiness. In the distance the dilapidated housing simultaneously serves as a stark contrast to the opulent physical appearance of Solness' home but also as a reflection (or a reminder) of the emotional bareness that governs the very abode. The branches of the tall trees evoke the crucial dimension of the play's denouement – the elevation from which Solness falls to the ground, but also the celestial heights in which Hilde wants him to build a castle. The ceremonious unveiling of Solness' new home ends in his death which can be read as the symbolic proclamation of the demise of the naturalistic insistence on architecture in Ibsen's drama. Solness abandons earthly building and disowns the literal plane of existence in favour of the

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid.

ethereal. In this way, the idea of the impossibility of home that surfaces throughout the prose oeuvre reaches a spatial resolution, that is to say, the spatial level of Ibsen's drama finally catches up with its thematic counterpart.

*John Gabriel Borkman* completes the process of the abandonment of the domestic through the figure of the ageing banker who, after years of isolation, gathers the strength to step outside of his home. The rejection of the domestic leads him, in a manner reminiscent of Solness, into the realm of the imagination, giving rise to visions of a different world order. While Solness wants to build castles in the air, Borkman's dream is notably more ambitious – he desires a 'kingdom'<sup>443</sup> of which he would be the creator and ruler but his fantasy ends in ruin. Although both characters no longer see any value in the material home, their false hopes take on a distinct spatial form. In denouncing the domestic architecture each of them is in fact substituting it for another locational entity and conjuring up the idea of home. Solness' castle in the air and Borkman's kingdom are two imaginary expressions of inhabitation that on a symbolic level function as expressions of the elemental need to be spatially rooted and sheltered – that is, to belong.

## Departing

Henrik Ibsen's place in theatre history is indelibly linked with the naturalistic setting of the domestic interior. The complex affective (and reflective) value of this element of the drama has been, as I have argued, a somewhat underappreciated aspect of the author's rich body of work. What is more, in the twentieth century it came to be perceived as a hindrance to Ibsen's art, largely on account of the burgeoning re-definition of theatre through the emergence of new conceptions of performance and cognate radical cultural movements. These theatrical forms were predicated on the rejection of the postulates of naturalism; however, it is precisely through the refusal of the genre's conceptual basis that the naturalistic aesthetic represents a hugely important period of theatre history. As Claude

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<sup>443</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Four: Pillars of Society, John Gabriel Borkman, When We Dead Awaken*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 198.

Schumacher has noted, naturalism represents ‘the foundation of today’s performance culture in the Western world.’<sup>444</sup> It will be no surprise, therefore, that its architectural “container,” the venue that naturalistic theatre has traditionally been linked to, shares a similar historical distinction. Marvin Carlson posits that if we were to look for a ‘certain cultural image of the “standard” theatre structure’ [...] in our society, this image is of the nineteenth century façade structure.’<sup>445</sup> Given how extensive Ibsen’s engagement with naturalism on stage was, we hardly need more proof of the important role the author plays in the development of theatre art as we know it today.

Through the figure of the home, Ibsen importantly contributes to the establishment of the realistic (naturalistic) idiom and over a period of two decades he surpasses it. The complex thematic and spatial examination of the home in Ibsen’s work anticipates the intensely altered cultural, social and political landscape of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Although anchored in a particular set of historical conditions, Ibsen’s prose plays demonstrate the lasting significance of the notion of inhabitation and the performative nature of the concept of home, bringing forth its multi-layered affective value. The performativity of home in his plays involves the daily practices which physically bind people to the domestic space and the equally penetrating reflective capacities which trigger feelings such as belonging, intimacy or alienation. The intertwining of the everyday processes of habitation, the social phenomena that configure the idea of home, and the related philosophically-charged contemplations precipitates a figurative returning to the sentience of home.

In the twenty-first century this process is infinitely more complex than at the time of Ibsen’s writing, yet still bearing a traceable commonality, a universal emotional fluidity that transcends historical, social or even aesthetic boundaries. In the remainder of this thesis, I examine the affective returning to the notion of home by turning to practices of theatre and

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<sup>444</sup> Claude Schumacher, *Naturalism and Symbolism in European Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>445</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 206.



performance that are far removed from, or even diametrically opposed to, the aesthetics of naturalism and, more broadly, the paradigms of dramatic theatre. I look at how, over a hundred years later, Ibsen's treatment of home resonates in conceptions of the art that dispel the traditional entity of theatrical illusion associated with modern drama. The particular focus of my investigation will be two contemporary interdisciplinary practitioners: Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker.

As I expand later, there appear to be no deliberate parallels or direct references to Ibsen in the work of these artists – no conscious evocation of the great dramatist's creative influence. I propose, however, that the connection between them is twofold. It exists at the level of the affective register of the experience of home, that is, in the processes of being at and making home and also in the sense of a series of thematic correlations. The performative expressions of home such as the domestic space, the family, the act of building, homelessness, the conflict between the private and the public (that is, between the personal and the political) which constitute the foundations of Ibsen's drama become modified through the questions of migration, exile and displacement in Mona Hatoum's art and of home as a gendered concept in the oeuvre of Bobby Baker.

## Home, Exile and Displacement: Henrik Ibsen and Mona Hatoum

### Foreword

Mona Hatoum's critique of home has been shaped by the political events in twentieth-century Middle East. Of Palestinian descent, Hatoum was born in the years after the end of the Second World War to refugee parents living in Lebanon and displacement of different kinds continued to figure prominently into her adulthood. Many of the works discussed in the present chapter invite this biographical thread as a starting point to interpreting their meanings but the sensibility she brings to the examination of home combines political engagement with poetic imagery, a coexistence through which the notion of politics is variously rejected and accentuated and often both at the same time. For Hatoum home is suspended between suggestions of conflict and violence and impressions of fragility and tenderness, indicating its impermanence and uncertainty as a structure and as a feeling.

The paragraphs that follow respond to a number of pieces presented as part of Hatoum's comprehensive retrospective at London's Tate Modern in 2016. However, to illustrate the twofold dimension of violence and tenderness in her art, I turn to a more recent work *Remains of the Day* (2018) exhibited at the White Cube gallery, also in London in the autumn of 2019. The installation features tables, chairs and similar domestic furniture in miniature form which has clearly been heavily burnt, conceivably exposed to a fire. There is a noticeable degree of aesthetic detail to the objects, a familiarity of shape and everyday function which is undercut by the charred surface that has altered their appearance definitively. The evocation of home initially elicited by the furniture is mixed with a sense of devastating disaster.

This artistic vision derives from Hatoum's personal experiences and situates her as a postcolonial artist. As a large geographical area, the Middle East has been, for centuries, permeated with political, social and economic influences of societies a great geographical

(as well as cultural) distance away from its indigenous population. American historian Martin Sicker notes that ‘the imperialist phase [of the region’s history], which began in the nineteenth century and lasted until the end of World War II, was followed by the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West that continued to the beginning of the last decade of the century.’<sup>446</sup> While following the demise of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Arab provinces were able to claim autonomy and sovereignty from the colonial overlords and form independent states<sup>447</sup>, the land occupied by the Palestinians was at first gradually and then more forcefully – in the aftermath of the Second World War – settled by the European Jewish population that survived the atrocities of the Holocaust.<sup>448</sup> For millions of Palestinians this meant the loss of home and a people’s homelessness continues to the present, marked by political tensions and armed conflict with the state of Israel.

This brief foray into history allows us to recognize Mona Hatoum’s examination of home as firmly located in the complex cultural legacy of the historical relationships of power, international politics, domination and practices of imperialism. As a postcolonial artist, Hatoum’s work resonates with the postulates of the academic field of postcolonial studies which, as American scholar Henry Schwartz writes, emerged ‘as the application of postmodern thought to the long history of colonizing practices’<sup>449</sup> and ‘interrogates both the past history and ongoing legacies of European colonialism [to establish a] “theoretical practice,” a transformation of knowledge from static disciplinary competence to activist intervention.’<sup>450</sup> Whether through the early solo performances, video or installations, Hatoum’s unique artistic practice can be considered as a kind of activist counterpart to the “theoretical practice” that Schwartz espouses. This she achieves, as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate, by actively engaging the audience to reflect on its own role, its explicit as

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<sup>446</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Middle East in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 1.

<sup>447</sup> See Martin Sicker, *The Middle East in the Twentieth Century* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001).

<sup>448</sup> See Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) and Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>449</sup> Henry Schwartz, “Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial Studies in the US Academy” in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Henry Schwartz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 6.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

well as implicit participation, in the discourses of cultural domination and the inherent relations of power and hierarchy.

According to critic and curator Guy Brett, from early on in Hatoum's career, participation 'stood for a transformation of the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the spectator, so that the artist's production would not be her own or her encoded expressivity dictated towards the other person as spectator, but would provide a means to the other person to become conscious of their own expressivity in the role of the participant.'<sup>451</sup> As Brett also writes, Hatoum's practice in the late 1970s was aligned with the 'innovations and critical debate within the field of visual arts [in the United Kingdom] set against and entwined with worldwide movements such as [...] feminism, [...], freedom of sexuality and human rights'<sup>452</sup>, and she 'quickly gravitated towards the avant-grade in the context of the British art world, towards the left in politics.'<sup>453</sup> Her continued allegiance with leftist political views highlights the significant contribution that her pursuit of the questions of home is making in relation to the political (and to an extent postcolonial) events in the present day – the mass migration to the West from Third World countries.

To shed light on this, however, it is necessary to draw attention once more to the artist's own experiences. As a factor of Hatoum's personal (and family) history, the unresolved strivings of Palestinians for national self-determination and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine,<sup>454</sup> instil her work with a deep sense of distrust in cultivating the idea(lization) of home as a stable and emotionally nurturing entity. The feeling of a crippled national identity was undoubtedly sharpened by her adopting the position of a marginal subject when through a sequence of unexpected events in the mid-seventies her intended brief visit to London coincided with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war.<sup>455</sup> The impossibility of return turned her trip into an extended stay and, eventually, the start of an

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<sup>451</sup> Guy Brett, "Between Artist and Spectator: Modes of Interaction" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Christine van Assche and Clarrie Wallis (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 39.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>454</sup> See James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>455</sup> See Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

artistic career. As we shall see, however, Hatoum found the cultural differences between London and Beirut profoundly perplexing which left her feeling isolated and marginalized. In relation to this, American scholar Rachel Bailey Jones writes that when Hatoum ‘chose to live at the margins, able to move between margin and center, she purposely formed a counternormative identity that was oppositional to the dominant unitary definition of self in relation to the dominant exclusive identity.’<sup>456</sup>

From this compromising position Hatoum develops a focus on the problematics of the threat to, or even the loss of, home in areas of the world which to a Western’s perspective are often culturally peripheral and inferior. In this way the artist places the twentieth-century figure of the refugee at the heart of her critique of home. If in the twentieth century her work deals specifically with the Palestinians relegated to refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan and, especially in the nineties, applies to Bosnian refugees, then in the twenty-first century it resonates particularly with the mass migration from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe. The pervasiveness of home in the art of Mona Hatoum reflects just how central home is to the way we live and think but also how fragile and elusive home can be in a world that appears to ceaselessly feed off conflict and violence.

This chapter consists of four parts and takes as the starting point the encounter with the exhibition of Hatoum’s extensive oeuvre at the Tate Modern in 2016. In line with many other scholarly discussions of Hatoum’s art, I interpret her work in close connection to her biography which leads me to propose that the primary performative expression in her creations is the figure of exile. As I show, this characteristic can also be applied to Henrik Ibsen and the overarching linkage I establish between the artists is that of exile as the creative force behind their artistic output. I ground this connection in the writings of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard.

The chapter continues by way of the examination of three types of parallels between Ibsen and Hatoum – ways in which Hatoum’s artworks can be read as reverberations of

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<sup>456</sup> Rachel Bailey Jones, *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education* (New York: Springer, 2011), 183.

Ibsen's dramaturgical processes. The parallels relate to: Hatoum's large-scale installations which I associate with Ibsen's dramatic settings and discuss in relation to the 1960s critique of theatre and installation art by scholar Michael Fried; Hatoum's sculptures of everyday domestic objects which I interpret as re-workings of Gustav Freytag's pyramid of dramatic action – a key structural device for dramatic theatre; and finally, Hatoum's maps of the world where her intertwining of the meanings of domestic intimacy and the global dimensions of world maps are reminiscent of Ibsen's integration of the domestic with the environment in *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman*. In the final part of the chapter, I turn to Hatoum's mapping installation *Present Tense* (1996) which problematizes the decades-long armed conflict between Israel and Palestine. I juxtapose both Palestinian and Israeli readings of the conflict and explore whether in the absence of a political solution art could offer some form of appeasement.

## Part I

### At the Gallery

*Measures of Distance* (1987): a dimly-lit room with a bench in the centre, a projection on the wall displays a sequence of soft focus still photographs of a human figure. Laid over them is a handwritten script in Arabic alphabet which functions as a kind of transparent page torn from a lined notebook. An audio recording comes on of women chatting in a non-Western language while the succession of images gradually reveals a female body in the act of bathing. The dialogue is interspersed with urban noise in the background. The impression is one of a domestic environment invaded by the bustle of traffic from the outside but this appears to be a sphere to which the viewer only has limited access. One's presence feels ostensibly inappropriate as if one were voyeuristically witnessing an intimate moment and eavesdropping on a private conversation until the layering of visuals and sounds is rounded off with a demure female voice: 'my dear Mona, the apple of my eye, how I miss you. [...] When you were here, the whole house was livened

up by your presence. Now it feels like the house has lost its soul. I wish this bloody war would be over soon so you and your sisters can return and we will all be together again.<sup>457</sup>

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A neighbouring room. Behind horizontal lines of steel wires which stretch from wall to wall fragments of an interior – a table with four chairs, a baby cot, between them two child-size chairs, a toy, a crate atop another. Further back a wire bench and a metal bed frame, two vacant coat stands. Elsewhere a bucket, some lamps, a birdcage, one more chair. Thus populated, the space feels sparse. There is no mattress on the bed, covers on the bench or duvet in the cot. There is no cloth spread over the table, instead it is filled with kitchen utensils: pots, cutlery, a colander turned upside down, a meat grinder. Scattered around and connected with wires are numerous light bulbs, some partially concealed by the various items. They come on and off, emitting a feeble glow and an unpleasant noise, the deliberately amplified hum of electricity. It is impossible to enter this arrangement of furnishings and – would you really want to? Yet there is something strangely gripping about the sight, the objects stripped to the bare elements, poorly lit and enveloped in a dissonant soundscape, defiantly forge a kind of interdependence. They establish associative relationships with one another, conveying the semblance of a home. The title on the side wall confirms (but also confounds) the inkling – *Homebound* (2000).

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A room further along the corridor. *Hot Spot* (2009) – a large sphere in the corner, it is a model of the globe composed of horizontally and vertically lined steel bars representing the earth's parallels and meridians. A sturdy, cold, cage-like yet elegant structure; neatly curved and hollow within. A bright red, thin neon cable is spread across the surface. It delineates the landmasses of the continents, its radiance projecting uneasily into the surrounding space of the gallery. A sense of tension and danger: the planet as if ablaze.

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<sup>457</sup>*Measures of Distance*, created by Mona Hatoum (1988; London), video.

## The Elusiveness of Home

The artworks in these brief descriptions revolve, each in their own way, around the notion of home. The opening sequence of *Measures of Distance* indicates the painful separation of family members owing to armed conflict. The arrangement of domestic objects in *Homebound* signifies an uninhabitable dwelling space, conceivably devastated and deserted. *Hot Spot*, the representation of the earth – the ultimate hypernym of home – marked out by a menacing glow, induces disorder on a worldwide scale. One is tempted to link these creations into a linear narrative in three parts: the film introduces the story's protagonists, the installation imagines their home ravaged by war, the sculpture carries a vision of the(ir) world as one of perpetual unrest. Were this a tale, its compelling arc from the intimate to the global would cast a damning verdict on humanity: the ceaseless elusiveness of home.

Mona Hatoum's 2016 retrospective at the Tate Modern, which triggered these recollections, surveyed over three decades of an illustrious career and offered ample additional evidence to uphold this conclusion. Home is invariably a damaged entity in her interdisciplinary body of work, its loss a crippling threat to the sense of self and to the feeling of belonging. Shaped by a complex set of circumstances, Hatoum's own experience of (the lack of) home may be viewed as an immediate creative impetus and *Measures of Distance*, an early and seminal piece, delivers an unusually revealing glimpse into the artist's life. The video strings together extracts from her mother's letters in which she recalls the daughter's visit home after years of absence, bemoaning the war which has divided them and prevented such occasions from being more frequent. The parent's most cherished memory is of the intimacy they shared while in the shower together, of the photos they took at the time and the recording of their conversations which elucidates the conceptual premise gleaned from the opening frame. Responding to the question from her child's previous letter – whether these materials can be used in her work – the mother replies: 'go ahead and use



them,’ and later adds ‘why don’t you come back and live here and we can make all the photographs and tapes you want.’<sup>458</sup>

Commonly referred to as a British artist Hatoum settled in London in the mid-seventies, having grown up in Lebanon, in a Palestinian family that fled the – now Israeli – town of Haifa after the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. *Measures of Distance* focuses on the period of the Lebanese civil war, a fractious conflict which severely disintegrated an ethnically and religiously diverse society, exposing in particular the vulnerable Palestinian immigrant population.<sup>459</sup> On a trip to the United Kingdom when the hostilities erupted, Hatoum found herself in a difficult position – unable to return and alone in a foreign land. She has described this experience as a ‘time of tremendous personal struggle, turmoil and confusion,’<sup>460</sup> powerlessly observing harrowing acts of violence from afar and having only sporadic contact with her loved ones. The descendent of refugees inadvertently succumbed to the fate of her forebears: dislodged, isolated and confronted with uncertainty in an environment that knew little of her and her people’s grief.

The film blends the scattered geographies of Hatoum’s predicament to create a touching account of deracination that stretches across generations, borders and cultures, tearing up tightly-woven ties between people and places, adumbrating a crumbling sense of home. The mother’s news, delivered over five letters, translated into English and narrated by the artist, is filled with anguish at the seemingly endless bloodshed which is complicating their being apart. Her sentiment ‘you are so close to my heart yet so far away from me’<sup>461</sup> evokes Martin Heidegger’s notion of “the thinking towards,” the process through which emotional capacities defy geographical distances to forge affective belonging to a locus of personal significance. While the video conceptually traces this idea, it challenges the sophistication of the philosopher’s theory, uncovering the crude reality of displacement through war. In contrast to the lyrical manner in which Heidegger depicts the progression of

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> The civil war in Lebanon lasted from 1975 to 1990. See Edgar O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-1992* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>460</sup> Michael Archer, “Interview” in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 9.

<sup>461</sup> *Measures of Distance*, created by Mona Hatoum (1988; London), video.

thought in the direction of a location, Hatoum's rendering documents the struggle of that trajectory as it negotiates a number of obstacles and setbacks on the way to its destination. This is nowhere more palpable than in the mother's final letter in which she writes of the bombing of the local post office and of her fears that future correspondence may no longer be possible for venturing out of the neighbourhood (to a different postal outlet) has become too dangerous. As Hatoum reads the note, the images of her mother are replaced by pitch-blackness which persists on the screen even after the words have run out. The affectionate domestic scene between parent and child dissolves into portentous silence and darkness. Peril, sorrow and loss are inevitable corollaries in Mona Hatoum's portrayal of home.

### **Interminable Transportivity of the Representations of Home**

Absorbing *Measures of Distance* in London, some thirty years after its creation, one is removed from the precarious political instabilities that shaped the meaning of habitation, the inherent workings of being at and making home, in a distant and volatile part of the world. Nevertheless, the ordering of sensibilities draws one to become part of Hatoum and her mother's spatial fragmentation and their "thinking towards". It calls for an emotional response or in the words of art historian Desa Philippi, 'the viewer is addressed in ways that demand a position: as a witness, [...] as a participant in performance; even as an observer one cannot remain neutral'<sup>462</sup>. The spectator is engaged into a figurative transportation, a revaluation of the importance of possessing a sense of home.

This reflective dimension is a recurrent device in the multidisciplinary oeuvre of Mona Hatoum, its charge fortified by a thematic range that fuses some of the most iniquitous elements of human nature with its innermost recesses. The juxtaposition of war and terror with moments and objects of the everyday generates a proliferation of meanings of home in which seeming contradictions are simultaneously accentuated and rendered invalid. While scholarship has commonly confined the interpretation of Hatoum's art to the specific political conditions that affected her upbringing, such demarcation underestimates

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<sup>462</sup> Desa Philippi, "The Witness Beside Herself", *Third Text* Vol. 4, Issue 12 (1990), 71.

the polyvalence of this work. Her representations of home reverberate throughout the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first, bringing attention to the regions of the world plagued by military conflict and the resultant social and economic destabilisation.

Consider a dominating mediatised image of our time: the forlorn procession of dispossessed masses fleeing their homelands. Travelling on foot, clutching a modicum of belongings, in their gait the unknown of what lies ahead. The plight of these people lingers in the artworks of Mona Hatoum and in them also reside the impoverished and the ailing condemned to squalid refugee camps as well as the throngs embarking on perilous forms of departure in the hope of reaching more peaceful and flourishing shores – a chilling prospect so starkly captured in the verse of contemporary British poet of Somali origin Warsan Shire who writes: ‘no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land’.<sup>463</sup> Hatoum’s attentiveness towards such dire destinies operates on the intellectual level of analytical engagement, making a contribution to the global discourse on migration and displacement as well as on a sensuous plane, creating aesthetic figurations of the fragility of inhabitation to offer a valuable reminder that home is not something that can be taken for granted.

In the new millennium the issue of human migration has been thrust to the forefront, playing a pivotal role in political decisions which may yet have historical consequences, signalling the likelihood of a weakening of hard-fought alliances, an intensification of age-old rivalries and a deepening of cultural differences across the globe. In the light of these tectonic shifts in the landscape of international relations the art of Mona Hatoum elicits extensive contemplation and revision. It promptly, often viscerally, delivers the viewer into the precarity of habitational permanence in geographical areas of deprivation and unrest. As subsequent pages will discuss, it also points to ways in which such oppressive chasms are, in more covert forms, present in the everyday of the comparatively privileged societies of the so-called developed democracies, portraying displacement as a paradigmatic human

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<sup>463</sup> Warsan Shire, “Home” in Alessandro Triulzi and Robert Lawrence McKenzie eds., *Long Journeys: African Migrants on the Road* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), xi.

condition not exclusively tied to war and terror. To borrow from British curator and writer Clarrie Wallis, Hatoum's opus displays 'the ability [...] to draw on particular cultural and political milieu and show how these are imbricated with wider, universal concerns.'<sup>464</sup> The artist's ingenuity reveals itself as infinitely interpretable and multifaceted – an interminably self-renewing creative practice.

### **Commonality in Divergence**

Discussing a variety of pieces by Mona Hatoum, the present chapter relates her treatment of home to the dramatic oeuvre of Henrik Ibsen. A comparative analysis of an author who importantly contributes to the establishment of the genre of modern drama and a decidedly postmodern female artist shifting between art forms abounds in challenges of perceived incompatibility, and so this study proceeds from the overarching commonality that the multivalent conception of home persistently represents the principal subject of their artistic examinations. From 1877 and until his penultimate play twenty years later, Ibsen's drama, as the preceding chapter has demonstrated, is predicated on interpersonal relationships in the domestic sphere and the strategic layout of these dwelling spaces in which the transformational journeys of the characters expose the shortcomings of the idealised (bourgeois) formations of home. Within a different set of social parameters a century and more later, the performances but especially installations and sculptures in the minimalist vein by Mona Hatoum engage with the material culture of the domestic as well as the practice of mapping (of which *Homebound* and *Hot Spot* outlined above are prime illustrations), subverting the everyday function of household paraphernalia and the way they are normally perceived in order to unsettle the traditional ideas of home as a familiar and stable entity.

The pair produce allied models of thinking about habitation, a (re)vision that interrogates the political as well as psychological facets of home and, crucially, incites

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<sup>464</sup> Clarrie Wallis, "Materials and Making" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Christine van Assche and Clarrie Wallis (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 119.

transportive spectatorial experiences, defying temporal and formal determinacy. What makes the juxtaposition of Hatoum and Ibsen worthwhile at the present time is that in their examinations of home, they deal with the manifold questions of location, the construction of self, the sense of belonging and the need for community that are as fundamental concerns of human existence now as they have been for centuries. The artists are particularly interested in the patterns of domestic inhabitation and they chip away at seemingly inconsequential moments of the everyday that occur in them and through which habitational attachments are formed. Foregrounding them in this way, their works exhibit the surging power of the feeling of home that resonates in the discourse of contemporary displacement.

The coupling of Ibsen and Hatoum is traced through two discrete but inevitably intertwined threads – the artists’ relationship to their respective places of origin and the employment of cognate dramaturgical tools. As regards the first, both have been associated with the trope of exile, a conflation that necessitates some careful qualification as their individual encounters with the loss or absence of home, explored here also through selected fragments of their biographies, differ considerably and are, above all, separated by decades. Yet from the contrasting experiences arises, I argue in the next section, a congruity – Hatoum and Ibsen perpetually revisit the subject of home by using as their vehicle the figure of the physical distance from the originary locus. Spatial separation affords them a unique position, a kind of organising principle through which they assemble the sensibilities towards the notion of home into extended meditations on domestic inhabitation, processes akin to what French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard has termed ‘topoanalysis [...], the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives’<sup>465</sup>. From them transpire distinct representations – naturalistic dramas in the case of Ibsen and artworks of various dimensions by Hatoum – and drawing on Bachelard, I consider these creations as instances of ‘miniature’<sup>466</sup>, that is, an imaginative ‘inversion on the perspective of size’<sup>467</sup> that ‘stimulates profound values’<sup>468</sup> and constitutes the artists’ performative expressions of home.

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<sup>465</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Arising from antithetical traditions of art, these exilic miniatures comprise strategies that exhibit dramaturgical affinity – the second thread of Hatoum’s and Ibsen’s interweaving – in the way the meanings of home are produced. Hatoum’s visually imposing large-scale pieces involving units of furniture have invited comparison to domestic settings of naturalist theatre, even, as we shall see, explicitly those of Ibsen, while the association between theatre and installation art was memorably made by art historian Michael Fried. In his essay “Art and Objecthood” (1967), Fried reproached minimalism’s emerging tendency of primary structures (which would eventually take on the designation installation art) for seeking to oppose established modernist genres of painting and sculpture and deriving meaning from the notionally theatrical elements of audience and duration. He argued that the sensibility behind these works of art was ‘theatrical because [it was] concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounter[ed them]’<sup>469</sup>, setting up ‘an indeterminate, open-ended – and unexacting – relation as *subject* to an impassive object.’<sup>470</sup> This kind of engagement between a spectator and an observed object was, in Fried’s view, a flaw while its other misconception was that rather than being immediately graspable, it could go ‘on and on’<sup>471</sup> resembling the arc of dramatic action.

In what is a scathing appraisal of theatre and ‘literalist art’<sup>472</sup> (his own coinage for installation) – Fried considered them both as ‘the negation of art’<sup>473</sup> – opens up the opportunity to juxtapose Ibsen’s and Hatoum’s examinations of home along the critic’s lines but at the same time read them anew. The penultimate part of this chapter establishes a conceptual axis between the pair by uncovering three types of dramaturgical connections from which the artists’ practices can be seen as continually approaching each other despite emanating from disparate aesthetics. Departing from Fried’s postulation that installation aligns itself with theatre by projecting an anthropomorphic quality, I consider the

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 125.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 125.

dramaturgical devices Ibsen and Hatoum exploit in the composition of the (performance) space and argue that the differing requirements of their respective art forms – one dependent on the immediate presence of a (loquacious) human body, the other on its absence – achieve a transportive effect with the connotations they stir for their audiences. This is followed by a focus on Hatoum's engagement with domestic objects where I explore Fried's claim that installation '*persists in time*'<sup>474</sup>, signifies 'endlessness'<sup>475</sup> and displays theatrical properties. I contend instead that her approach to these household miniatures resonates with Gustav Freytag's pyramid structure of dramatic action. Broken into five parts, this model represents an integral underlying principle of Ibsen's plots while in Hatoum's appropriation it becomes a compressed evocation of the traditional dramatic structure.

Hatoum's interest in the domestic acquires an additional layer of meaning when examined together with an equally important strand of her oeuvre – maps and mappings. Side by side, these works produce the contrast between the inside and the outside which is often modified as a tension between the intimate and the collective. Identifying three principal attitudes to inhabitation in the varied compendium of maps – the attributes of reflection, agency and destruction – I link this dramaturgical extension of the notion of home across different media to Ibsen's skilful interplay of the inside/outside dialectic in the prose plays, particularly *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman* as analysed in the preceding chapter. Building on the idea of the map as a representation of collective home for a multitude of people, the final segment of the chapter returns to the biographical interpretation of Hatoum's oeuvre. It sheds light on the specific context of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which is central to her family's and her people's identity of displacement, through a consideration of the cartographic installation *Present Tense* (1996). Thematically complex but visually modest, the piece draws the viewer into a problematic to which politics is expected to provide convincing answers but continually fails to do so. What is more, while Hatoum acknowledges that the artist is unable to offer the means of resolution

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

in a state of destruction and instability, political structures resort to the language of art to carry out a demagogic evasion of the urgently pressing questions at the heart of which is that of home and lasting peace for both sides embroiled in the turmoil. Might art hold *a* key to reconciliation after all? I contemplate this in the concluding paragraphs of the chapter.

## Part II

### From Habitational Disruption to Itinerant Dispersion: a Translation

Becoming stranded in London at the start of the Lebanese civil war signified a critical turning point for Hatoum's career. Out of it grew a politicized voice in a series of uncompromising performance pieces which underscored her consternation and pointed to the emotional detachment of the Western world from the continued unrest in the Middle East. In *Under Siege* (1982), a durational work, Hatoum confined herself to a transparent plastic tank filled with clay for several hours which created a slippery surface causing her to repeatedly lose balance only to defiantly attempt to regain it. The ordeal, which she has described as 'a statement about a persistent struggle to survive'<sup>476</sup> in an environment of armed conflict, unfolded to the recordings of news bulletins, music and snippets of conversation in Arabic, French and English, the languages she grew up with, including a brief exchange between the artist and a seemingly uninformed interlocutor:

I spend day after day on the phone, dialling and redialling.

*Who are you calling?*

I am trying to locate my parents.

*Why is it such a problem phoning home?*

I'm not phoning home.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Mona Hatoum, "Artist's Writings" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher (London: Phaidon, 1997), 122.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.



The dissociation of family and home – commonly synonymous tropes – in this passage serves as a moving accompaniment to the simultaneous physical exertion. The matter-of-factness and the economy of words are piercing while the suggestion of an abruptly severed familial tie enhances the growing discomfort provoked by the bodily strain. The uncoupling of the traditional tropal homogeneity does not result in a bifurcation into two distinct, coexisting notions but rather bereaves the artist of each as much as of their unattainable semantic sum thus producing a void. The apparent lack of a response from the inquisitive party in the conversation only exacerbates the unsettling emptiness – it leaves the afflicted artist unexpressed in their distress as the all-encompassing issue of war and violence is circumvented. Not only has the sense of the originary home been shattered, the environment that has come to constitute an opportune refuge appears to extend no form of solace or compassion.

For Hatoum this piece signified an ‘act of separation, [...] stepping out of an acquired frame of reference [towards] a point of reconnection and reconciliation with [...] the bloody history of my people.’<sup>478</sup> The performance conveyed the disquiet of a uniquely uprooted individual founded on a collective identity of territorial dispossession of the Palestinians to expound a state of rage, of a terror showing little indication of ceasing despite increased visibility throughout the international community. By way of a sense of isolation Hatoum assumed the position of a marginal subject. Over time, however, the embattled tone in her work yielded to subtler explorations of home, bringing to her practice a nuanced sensibility and a multitude of meanings, mainly through the aesthetic of minimalism and postminimalism. The driving force of this creative refraction was the transformation of the absence of habitational stability into a method of working. Becoming increasingly established, Hatoum embraced the opportunity to travel extensively and undertake commissions and residencies across Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. This encouraged her to draw inspiration from a kind of nomadism, eventually leading her to assert, as recorded by art historian Sheena Wagstaff, ‘I think better when I am on the move

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

[...] because I don't expect myself to identify with any one place. They are all provisional bases from which to operate.'<sup>479</sup>

This penchant for itineracy is communicated in *Routes* (2002-8), a series of drawings based on maps printed in airline brochures. Appropriating the thin lines which chart a carrier's destinations on offer, Hatoum completely modifies the connections between cities worldwide – and their intersections – with scribbles of irregular shapes to create her own imaginative trajectories. The redefinition of the flight paths acts as a renouncing of geographical accuracy in favour of the emotional claiming of the journey as an entity of equal significance to its start and end points. The process of movement no longer provides a means but emerges as a substance in its own right. It opens a new set of spatial possibilities and becomes a tangible possession; the transience of transport institutes a habitable notion, reinforced by the title's semantic evocation of the homonym "roots" which conjures up the meaning of motionlessness to form an oxymoronic interrelation.

Hatoum's craft is situated between locational disruption and dispersion. It is mindful of the position from which it emanates and extends into a variety of directions. The spatial element is a fundamental dimension of the oeuvre and home its axis. Considered, in the words of curator and art critic Catherine de Zegher, as a 'transcultural artist'<sup>480</sup> in consequence of the ruptured geographies that marked the outset and early development of her career, Mona Hatoum simultaneously straddles and confounds classifications of human displacement that she has been associated with through her work. The concurrence of Hatoum's planned sojourn in London and the outbreak of the war in Lebanon might prompt the assumption that this constitutes her as a refugee; however, the widely documented account of the coincidental overlapping of these events precludes the inference that she was forced to leave a war-torn territory. To assign the definition of migrant appears to similarly misrepresent Hatoum's circumstances as her intended temporary relocation was not

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<sup>479</sup> Sheena Wagstaff, "Uncharted Territory: New Perspectives in the Art of Mona Hatoum" in Mona Hatoum, *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land* (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), 41.

<sup>480</sup> Catherine de Zegher, "Hatoum's Recollection: About Losing and Being Lost" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher (London: Phaidon, 1997), 103.

precipitated by an economic impulse. The term exile, whilst compelling, is equally problematic for it presupposes, in its primary meaning, an ideological rift between the individual and the state, that is, as the ensuing pages will expand in more detail, a form of heavily contested political dissension. An additional complicating aspect of these codifications is that although she was not born in the United Kingdom Hatoum has held its passport throughout her life, owing to her father's occupation as British consulate official (initially in Palestine and later in Lebanon). In the strict juridical sense, then, taking up residence in London due to external factors meant that she settled in the country of her citizenship thereby purportedly relegating the partially applicable categories of dislodgement to something of an irrelevance.

Though conceivably her (other) homeland, Britain was a profoundly unfamiliar world which generated for Hatoum the 'feeling of in-betweenness that [came] from not being able to identify with my own culture and the one in which I [was] living.'<sup>481</sup> Legally a citizen but intimately a foreigner – not really an exile and neither a refugee nor quite a migrant – Hatoum in a way shuns political designation but at the same time cannot entirely escape the inscriptions and it is impossible to deny the interweaving of these forms of displacement in her representations of home. She instead elucidates her precarious position in broader, cultural terms, her postulation of liminality evoking the renowned theorist Homi Bhabha's contention that the act of physical transition from one place to another, a phenomenon he examines from a postcolonial (diasporic) perspective, inherently comprises the process of translation. Through it the affected subject confronts 'incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – that are the basis of cultural identifications [and require] regulation and negotiation,'<sup>482</sup> and while manifested spatially this operation naturally involves a temporal component, opening up the prospect of a blending of cultures over time, that is, of hybridization which is not without tension. The condition, Bhabha continues,

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>482</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012), 313.

of the “in-between,” the minority position, dramatizes the activity of culture’s untranslatability; and in so doing, it moves the question of culture’s appropriation beyond the assimilationist’s dream [...] towards an encounter with the ambivalent process of splitting and hybridity that marks the identification with culture’s difference.<sup>483</sup>

Viewed in the light of translational collisions, adaptational insidencies and the resulting transmutations, the oeuvre of Mona Hatoum often proffers the multifaceted concept of home as its “stubborn chunk,” the incomprehensible, foreign constituent which undergoes an infinite set of interrogations and deconstructions in an attempt to get to grips with the many traits of the inhabitational apparatus. Hatoum wrestles with the meanings of home by navigating both the socially marginal and culturally liminal positions and combining them with a nomadic proclivity to propose a copiously informed outlook on the notion of habitation with universal appeal. The sense of marginality supplies her art with attention to social structuration and diversity, the feeling of in-between-ness enables the examination of the merits and the drawbacks of cultural difference while rootlessness and exposure to a range of environments bring a continually expanding creative vision. The juncture of these strands of Hatoum’s experience constitutes the building blocks of the transportive quality of the expressions of home, that is, a form of affective attunement between the meanings intrinsic to the artist and their projection for spectatorial reception.

### **Of Distance and Perspective**

In Henrik Ibsen’s *Lady Inger of Østraat* (1854) the antagonist Nils Lykke, a widely-travelled and cunning political operator, plots against the rich Norwegian landowner Lady Inger by attempting to seduce her young daughter. To stir the girl’s emotions he exploits her sheltered, provincial existence and appeals to his own worldliness and sense of adventure which, presumably, she will be able to enjoy if he can win her affection:

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 321.

How often have you not sat here in Østraat alone, your brain in a whirl longing to get away, to flee far away, you know not whither? How often have you not wandered alone along the fjord, and a gilded ship with knights and ladies aboard, with harps and singers, has glided by, far from the shore; a faint echo of mighty deeds has floated to your ear; and you have felt a longing in your breast, an irresistible longing to know what exists on the other side of the sea?<sup>484</sup>

There may be something of Ibsen's own "longing" in this passage. A struggling artist wanting to experience the world, he encountered many obstacles in his way. He yearned to visit 'London, Paris, the larger German cities, Copenhagen and Stockholm, with the special purpose of studying dramatic art and literature'<sup>485</sup> but several of his grant applications to the government were unsuccessful and it was not until years later that he finally received support to travel to Rome. He left Norway in 1864 and did not return – save for two brief visits – until 1891. Early correspondence from this period offers an insight into the dramatist's dispositions and betrays a lingering resentment for scarce acknowledgement afforded to his body of work. This suggests that while Italy was proving artistically liberating – his big breakthrough work *Brand* (1866) as well as *Peer Gynt* (1867) were written there – home matters continued to weigh on his mind. He seems to work through some of the accumulated unease in a communication to authoress Magdalene Thoresen, when he reflects that

a time abroad such as I am now having makes many changes in a man, and  
in my case they have been for the better. [...] I had to get away from the

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<sup>484</sup> Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen: The Making of a Dramatist 1828-1864* (London: Hart-Davis, 1967), 134-135. (Note that *Lady Inger of Østraat* has not been published in Meyer's translation. The quoted passage appears in Meyer's biographical study of Ibsen.)

<sup>485</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen*, ed. Mary Morison (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), 65.

beastliness up there before I could begin to be purified. I could never lead a consistent spiritual life there; I was one man in my work and another outside of it – and for that very reason my work failed in consistency too.<sup>486</sup>

Ibsen's social scene in Rome was restricted to the community of fellow expatriates at the Scandinavian Club, a gathering place for intellectuals and travelling artists from Northern Europe. In this way he kept abreast of news from Norway and this interplay of conscious seclusion from the homeland and simultaneous heightened emotional investment in its political and cultural life formed a cyclical dynamic of closeness and remoteness – a deliberately manufactured affective scattered-ness (he later also lived in Dresden and Munich). According to Meyer, Ibsen believed that 'distance gives one a broader perspective'<sup>487</sup> to which the collection of dramatic characters and plots innately, and so inextricably, tied to his country of origin unfailingly attests. The fictional family settings from *Pillars of Society* to *When We Dead Awaken* are replete with locational specifications of named towns or regions, buttressed further by tactically inserted indicators of the environment in the form of references to the seasons, the weather (notably the harsh winters) as well as aspects of the culture such as social customs, religious beliefs and even – where employed – the cuisine.

The life Ibsen portrays exhibits an authenticity with the patterns of inhabitation of a particular place and time. At the same time, however, this consistency of locale has its geographical other – the recurrently evoked dimension of the abroad. In *A Doll's House*, Italy is the fondly remembered place of the Helmers' happiness, Torvald's improved health and Nora's seductive tarantella; in *Ghosts*, Paris is meant to provide a refuge of sorts for the young Oswald but, tragically, proves not far enough for him to escape the deadly shadow of his father's debauchery which is why he returns home. In *John Gabriel Borkman*, Erhart is desperate to assert his independence and head to warmer climates with Mrs Wilton to avoid

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<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>487</sup> Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen: The Farewell to Poetry 1864-1882* (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 76.

the frostiness of the parents' relationship. Alternating between home and away – the materially present “here” and the “there” persistently conjured up in words – constitutes a central agency of Ibsen's drama. This negotiation derives from simultaneously experiencing multiple cultures and adopting a liminal position with which, like Mona Hatoum, he grapples through the medium of art. Ibsen's prose oeuvre exhibits him as an author shaped by an inquisitive and reflective kind of wayfaring out of which emerge vividly imagined domestic worlds, localities to which his characters appear to be roped as if by compulsion while thoughts of other, seemingly redemptive places hover about. Physically separated from his country of birth (by choice), his sensibility is in the service of great theatrical innovation or to quote British literary scholar Brian Johnston, Ibsen's ‘endeavour [is] as much a difficult self-emancipation as [it is] a description of humanity. [He represents] an artist in isolation discovering in himself the history of mankind, and in the history of the mankind his own spiritual growth.’<sup>488</sup>

### **Reconciling Disparities**

The period during which Ibsen favoured detachment from the homeland has frequently been referred to as his exile. While leaving Norway appeared to foster a sense of personal empowerment eventually culminating in the advent of a new kind of drama, much about his prolonged absence may not have been a case of conscious objective on the part of the author. William Archer, his foremost champion in England, and arguably one of a very exclusive circle of close associates, noted that Ibsen's position

has often been misrepresented. He left Norway not only of his own free will but with every intention of returning after a year or so. This design he abandoned because he found the solitude-in-society of a great foreign city

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<sup>488</sup> Brian Johnston, *The Ibsen Cycle: The Design of the Plays from Pillars of Society to When We Dead Awaken* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 62.

more suited to his temperament than the eternal publicity of life in a comparatively small Norwegian town such as Christiania.<sup>489</sup>

Ibsen's lengthy stint abroad sets up what historian David Kettler, in a study of European intellectual migrations during a somewhat different period, fifty or so years later, describes as 'a commonplace figurative identification of the modernist artist [...] with "exile" by virtue of their distance from – their elevation above – the ensnared multitude'<sup>490</sup>. This tendency is at variance with exile's principal denotation of expulsion based on ideological opposition to a governing political rule and according to Kettler 'risks the reduction of the claim to exile status to a self-dramatizing gesture'<sup>491</sup>, the outcome he finally labels as 'the metaphorical sense of exile.'<sup>492</sup> Ibsen's career is inevitably shaped through the narrative of this misappropriation of the concept as a political tool which, literary comparatist Johannes F. Evelein writes, dates back to the advent of Romanticism when a new generation of artists 'grew increasingly antagonistic toward a world [of the Enlightenment] that worshipped man's intellect and rational powers, whose attitude toward nature was instrumental rather than inspirational, and that sought to control rather than celebrate human emotions.'<sup>493</sup> The pursuit of a temporary removal from the familiar milieu in order to explore foreign landscapes – for inspiration and, purportedly, to discover one's self – became a crucial element of this conceptual turn and Ibsen's lasting project.

In her study of Mona Hatoum, art historian Patricia Falguières proposes that 'the path of exile'<sup>494</sup> provides an 'obvious landmark'<sup>495</sup> in her oeuvre and a common interpretive route for its examination. Hatoum's exilic circumstances could be said to challenge Kettler's neat distinction between the metaphorical and the political: while the extensive body of work

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<sup>489</sup> William Archer, Foreword to *The League of Youth, Pillars of Society, A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, transl. William Archer (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co, 1904), viii.

<sup>490</sup> David Kettler, *The Liquidation of Exile: Studies in the Intellectual Emigration of the 1930s* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>493</sup> Johannes F. Evelein, ed., *Exiles Traveling: Exploring Displacement, Crossing Boundaries in German Exile Arts and Writings 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 15.

<sup>494</sup> Patricia Falguières "Disbelonging" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Christine van Assche and Clarrie Wallis (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 59.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.



created in direct reference to global itineracy positions her among artists who negotiate figurative exile, her identity as a postcolonial subject and a descendant of refugees living in a country with a raging civil war present charged ideological arguments – the absence of explicit banishment notwithstanding. This indeterminacy brings to mind the artist's liminal predicament but perhaps also suggests that more than the (precise) classification it is the affective magnitude of her experience that matters. Hatoum grapples with the meanings of home to expose the uncertainty, fraught hopes and depredations brought on by violence and war. By way of creative imagination she articulates what, in his essay "Reflections on Exile", fellow Palestinian Edward Said, arguably one of the most incisive scholarly minds on the topic of exile, has described as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place'<sup>496</sup>, highlighting that a nurturing sense of home can be a thwarted quest.

Spared such severity, Ibsen's participation in the fecund aesthetic trope of exile is, it should be said, not devoid of the political. Rather, it is steeped in the historical particularity of a complex and precarious period of modernity – moulded by considerable social change, the declining supremacy of ecclesiasticism and advancement in scientific thought, themes which noticeably mark his work. These factors, among others, contributed to the increased mobility of the population across borders but also to the solidification of the ideal of a secular nation state. Coveting the transcendent potentialities of spatial non-attachment, the playwright witnessed the unifications of both of his host countries, Italy and Germany, in which he recognised a possible future of independence for his native Norway.<sup>497</sup> It was, as John Fletcher and James McFarlane have proposed, 'by virtue of his very foreignness [that] he found himself supremely equipped to play the detached observer'<sup>498</sup> to these events. Not only did they affect how he conceived of his surroundings, they also precipitated the dawn

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<sup>496</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>497</sup> The union with Sweden was disbanded in 1905 when Norway became an independent nation. See Raymond E. Lindgren, *Norway-Sweden: Union, Disunion, and Scandinavian Integration* (New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1959).

<sup>498</sup> John Fletcher, James McFarlane, "Modernist Drama: Origins and Patterns in Modernism" in *Modernism 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 500.

of a different world order that eventually declared itself at the outbreak of the First World War.

The concept of the state offers a useful lens to reconcile the differing historical conditions of Ibsen's and Hatoum's exilic fortunes. Over a hundred years that divide the artists saw an unparalleled scale of destruction and a profound uprooting of humanity in which the idea of the nation state played a major role. First in replacing the empire as the dominant method of social organisation and, second, by being turned into a glorified form of totalitarian leadership, based on the ambition for (racial) superiority and imperialism. In the aftermath of two global wars the meaning of exile transformed substantially – in Edward Said's succinct analysis it became 'neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible [as thousands upon thousands were torn] from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography.'<sup>499</sup> The state emerged as a divisive, 'insidious'<sup>500</sup> notion, aiming 'to supplant all other human bonds'<sup>501</sup> and using hostility to alienate the ostensibly undesirable elements of a populace from its structures. Hatoum is part of the generation that has had to work through the consequences of this abominable ideology and, what is more, hails from the region that has seen the problematic of the state resurface in a most complicated manner, eluding resolution to the present day. She and Ibsen therefore find themselves at the opposite ends of the phenomenon of statism – the latter experiences its initial flourish, the former the extended ramifications of its cataclysmic aberration, a contrast that cleaves a decisive qualitative split between them.

Sewn into the fabric of the time frame to which the pair form the separate ends is another significant transformation, the shift that accounts for the disparity of paradigm between the modernist playwright and the postmodern multidisciplinary artist. The demarcating line in their portrayal of home can be drawn through Theodor Adorno's understanding of the cognate entities of house and home. Overcome with despair in the face

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<sup>499</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 174.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

of the devastation of Europe's burgeoning twentieth-century culture at the hands of fascism, the theorist famously noted that '[d]welling in the proper sense is now impossible. The traditional residences we grew up in have grown intolerable. [...] The house is past [and] it is part of morality not to be at home in one's house.'<sup>502</sup>

Recorded in exile in the United States, this declaration has attracted modernist and postmodernist interpretations alike. In her study of the metaphoric uses of displacement across modernism and postmodernism, Caren Kaplan evokes conceptual alignment with Ibsen when she argues that Adorno's 'response to displacement can be viewed as quintessentially modernist [for] it embraces distance and estrangement as requirements for critical insight'<sup>503</sup>. In contrast, literary scholar Ada Savin allows us to see a parallel between Adorno and Hatoum, considering his words as a 'categorical statement [that] closes the door on the long chapter of modern history and ushers in the postmodern era which calls into question past certainties or else dismisses them altogether.'<sup>504</sup> For the playwright occupying the territory of the modern, the house represents the required structural framework that supports the primary spatial unit of his drama – the lavishly furnished drawing room. Though, as noted in Chapter One, Ibsen inventively negotiates the limitations this imposes on plot development the visual presence of the architectonics of the house remains an essential part of his quest for truth as the highest value which, in naturalism, is closely associated with the detailed reproduction of external (material) reality. Adorno's postmodernist denunciation of the very architectural structure that provides the foundation for Ibsen's realism anticipates the emphatic rebuke of the material culture of the home and the questioning of its linkage with the idea of comfort that marks the work of Mona Hatoum. This sense of habitational disintegration proliferates even deeper in Adorno's later assertion

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<sup>502</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 38-39.

<sup>503</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 118-19.

<sup>504</sup> Ada Savin, Introduction to *Migration and Exile, Charting New Literary and Artistic Territories*, ed. Ada Savin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 7.

that '[f]or a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live'<sup>505</sup> in which we can trace a conceptual precursor to Hatoum's claim to habitation in the scribbles of flight paths she explores in the aforementioned *Routes*, proposing home as an epistemological abstraction in expressly postmodern fashion.

To conceive of the transformations of the art form in the temporal lapse between Ibsen's demise and Hatoum's emergence through the entity of the house might risk a reductionism of sorts. The transition from the early 1880s conceptions of the modern in art for which, as Malcolm Bradbury concludes, Ibsen was 'the supreme exponent'<sup>506</sup> to their rejection at the behest of a new set of critical and artistic practices of postmodernism is a complex and, inevitably, contested affair. Nevertheless, in reliance on as well as in repudiation of the house, the oeuvres of Ibsen and Hatoum exhibit a shared preoccupation with the notion of home. That is to say, that home (but not house) endures unperturbed by the passage of time and the currents of change, its emotional significance impressed firmly into the human consciousness.

### **Miniaturising the World – Amplifying the Art**

Of varied creative outlooks (as well as historical periods and experiential make-up) the exilic positions of Ibsen and Hatoum are spliced by yielding the same outcome: the manifestation of dislocation through the language of art. In this section I establish that, by virtue of distance, exile becomes the artists' shared performative expression of home. Ibsen's prose plays on one side and Hatoum's installations and sculptures on the other signify two registers of the same language and conduct a figurative transportation – a continuous revision of the emotional texture of being at and making home. The catalyst of this process is the absence of the primary home, its remoteness from and inaccessibility to the artists. It engages them to explore the interactions between intimacy, personal and public

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<sup>505</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 51.

<sup>506</sup> Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism" in *Modernism 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 43.

(outside) space, a version of Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological concept of topoanalysis which allows us to recognise 'the intimate values of inside space.'<sup>507</sup> Each in their own way, Ibsen and Hatoum examine the patterns of domestic living, focusing on the often unnoticed fragments of the quotidian and accumulating them into habitational mosaics of abundant affective substance.

Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1957) introduces a number of approaches to understanding the human experience of private dwellings by drawing on examples from literature, particularly poetic imagery but also prose. He dedicates a chapter to the miniature, a common figure in fairy tales which, he feels, is too easily dismissed as mere fantasy. In his view a miniature, such as a carriage the size of a bean in one of Charles Nodier's stories, is a highly inventive tool and despite the limited dimensions 'a refuge of greatness.'<sup>508</sup> To appreciate the potential of miniatures one should look beyond the determinations of geometrical scale towards the ingenious detail contained in them for attentiveness to these miniscule entities enables us to become more 'world conscious.'<sup>509</sup> Relating 'the dynamic virtues of miniature thinking'<sup>510</sup> to the experience of the everyday, Bachelard highlights the vantage point of a belfry from which the landscape on the horizon presents itself as a 'universe in miniature.'<sup>511</sup> The gaze absorbing this sight confers a momentary sense of domination but less in a territorially controlling way than as a means of systematic mental ordering of the vastness in the range of vision. One's own imaginative thinking is called upon to organise the immensity sprawling underneath, an abstract compartmentalisation of space into discrete units of meaning. Contending that the human capacity for imagination is of equal significance as the faculty of perception, Bachelard establishes the concept of the miniature as a kind of contemplative mechanism that connects a psychological reality with geographical awareness.

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<sup>507</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, transl. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 173.

The operation of this phenomenological construct provides the platform to illuminate the exilic nature of Ibsen's and Hatoum's craft. Their probing of home, conducted from a great distance, functions as exercises in miniaturizing. That is to say, the artists condense a multitude of reflections related to inhabitation and extract from them familiar particles of domestic dwelling. For them, to follow Bachelard, 'distance disperses nothing but, on the contrary, composes a miniature'<sup>512</sup> of a place to which belonging is claimed. This opens up the transportive dimension of the artwork where the pair's reflective journeys summon a spectator's contemplation on home. Images, be they of visual or narrative kind, 'offer themselves for [...] "possession" while denying the distance that created them'<sup>513</sup> – from the intersection of domestic intimacy and spatial remoteness surfaces a sentience of inhabitation which carries a universal resonance, transgressing temporal and cultural boundaries, including those between art forms.

In the consciously adopted manner of movement across Europe, Ibsen's life away from Norway functions as a strewn topology of provisional homes out of which grows (one might say paradoxically) a geographically rooted drama enclosed in domestic settings that (extending the paradox) resonates far beyond its confines and repeatedly examines the questions of being at and making home. While the everyday Norway from the newspapers or letters he reads and the conversations he participates in supplies the raw matter, the Norway Ibsen arranges into the theatrical mould in nearly every play of his prose oeuvre – the miniature Norway – presents a way for him to hold on to a rudimentary sense of home and at the same time negotiate the conflicting sentiments bound with it over time. Ibsen's miniaturizing, that is, inverting of perspective, is informed by several sources: the primordial, intimate experience of home, the more refined, cultural understanding of the concept, as well as the series of relocations between Rome, Dresden and Munich.

Within the matrix of drama, framed by dialogic disclosures in elaborately thought-out interior settings, his characters' inhabitation is invariably exhibited through forms of

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

discord which unleash the spectatorial transportive experiences. As examined in the preceding chapter, Nora is compelled to leave her family in order to discover a sense of self. Oswald Alving and Gregers Werle are estranged from their ancestral homes and, on returning, find them to be the causes of personal misery and misfortune. Halvard Solness feels an insatiable and ultimately fatal desire for constructing houses that never become wholesome homes and finds fleeting comfort in fantasies of raising celestial towers while John Gabriel Borkman consigns himself to solitude in the decaying family residence in fear of public scrutiny and humiliation. These households represent dramatic miniatures wrapped into a narrative arc, composed of ordinary domestic moments and habitational dispositions to reveal how being at home and making home involve an infinitely complex sensibility towards oneself and the world.

The miniature formulations in the work of Mona Hatoum are similarly facilitated by the artefacts of commonplace domestic objects and the practice of mapping, two performative expressions of home that display affinity with the dramaturgical procedures in Ibsen's prose oeuvre. As for the dramatist so for Hatoum the miniatures present ways of negotiating dislocation; they are attempts at making sense of the emotional fracture of habitation. Rather than comfort, Ibsen's and Hatoum's imagined homes confront. In the following section, I look at three areas of conceptual intertwining between the artists by way of a sustained focus on the installations and sculptures of Mona Hatoum while throughout establishing links to Ibsen's work.

### **Part III**

#### **Hatoum's Domestic Triptych: Towards an Ibsenian Mise-en-Scène**

The installation *Homebound*, introduced in the prologue of the chapter, is arguably the most elaborate of Hatoum's pieces to explore the sphere of the domestic. The title carries a double meaning – one of spatial stasis and confinement, the other of itinerancy in the sense of return. Instead of dividing opinion on whether its bound-ness conveys a stifling constrictiveness or a yearning movement in the direction of a purportedly cherished locus,

the artwork leaves the binary tension aside to propose a more pressing question of what it means to inhabit, to have a home, to be at home. The probing is shaped by the material paucity, a carefully thought-out composition of selected household items that produces the sense of rigour and restraint. The overriding feeling is one of abandonment, desolation, a destruction of sorts. This space, it seems, can scarcely satisfy the fundamental purpose of sheltering human existence.

Hatoum adopts an interrogative stance towards the notion of home as a haven of communal contentment and self-realisation. The units of furniture, the habitual companions of the domestic everyday, take on an oppressive character. The visual emphasis is on the objects' properties rather than their aesthetic appeal or functional use, notably the various metal alloys that form (parts of) them, proffering the hard, compact substance as a mark of coldness and detachment. The interplay of the repeatedly glowing light bulbs and the shiny steel and brass surfaces augments the discomfort and deepens the impersonal overtones of the arrangement. It further increases the sombre atmosphere and evokes a threatening setting in which the only hint of activity (life?) is the ominous buzzing of the electrical current.

The artist's interest is in disrupting the conception of private dwelling spaces as stable entities so as to highlight that the prevalence of such ideas neglects a multitude of diametrically contrasted experiences of home which elude the conflation of inhabitation with comfort. The intention attests to Hatoum's heightened sensitivity to positions of otherness or marginality with regard to a dominant trend or culture. This appears to include a critique of the social and economic privilege but stops short of the tendency to over-politicize in order to unlock an emotional and reflective register of communication. The viewer is compelled to call into question the notion of an abiding, uniform reality and appreciate the surrounding world as a set of coexisting, if discordant, *realities* at the core of which home – in its spatial, material and figurative facets of manifold dimensions – constitutes a kind of common denominator, the figure that serves as a widely acknowledged reference point in understanding oneself in relation to the environment.



Art historian Sheena Wagstaff proposes that in engaging with *Homebound*, ‘we are encouraged to mentally project ourselves into the installation, our imagination [promptly] captured,’<sup>514</sup> as we are ‘invited to journey to where we can feel, see and recognise,’<sup>515</sup> that is, allow ourselves to be transported and renewed in the capacity to respond to the artwork in a contemplative manner. This ability to captivate distinguishes a number of Hatoum’s pieces which explore the realm of the domestic, a long-standing and varied project with recurrent themes and visual motifs. There exists a distinct connotational continuity among a number of pieces in this strand of the opus and is particularly pronounced in *Homebound*’s immediate antecedent *Home* (1999). An ostensibly less developed version, the earlier installation features a table behind a wire fence packed with kitchen utensils and cables spread across that lead, unsurprisingly, to intermittently glowing light bulbs while the industrial whirl of electricity hovers about. It is not difficult to recognize in this arrangement the seed that eventually blossomed into a full-blown ramshackle abode of *Homebound*, taking hold in the proverbial heart of the house, or should we say, its hearth – the kitchen. The spatial amplification enables the use of a more extensive and diversified range of furniture and other components of domestic life as the artist remains committed to the examination of habitation while perceptibly intensifying the affective impact of a previously conceived creation.

Stemming from the same root and carrying equal transportive charge is *Mobile Home II* (2005), a work that completes Hatoum’s triptych of cognate installations of the domestic. Delimited by two parallel metal crowd barriers, it comprises an understated habitational idyll: a wooden chair and table in the centre, a tin cup and bowl poised to offer sustenance, a smaller chair and a stool, both made of wood, to each side. Positioned diagonally in the space are two leather suitcases, a plastic tray trolley in their path, to the left a toy lorry with figurines stacked in its load; a bedroll on the floor right of centre, a small plastic bowl with knick-knacks at the rear. Between the barricades and above the

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<sup>514</sup> Sheena Wagstaff, “Uncharted Territory: New Perspectives in the Art of Mona Hatoum” in Mona Hatoum: *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land* (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), 32.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

constellation, lined up in equidistant rows, are wires sprinkled with clothes pegs, some solitary others holding in place dishcloths, ornamental embroidery, children's drawings, a soft toy and an inflatable globe. The strings are in fact part of a pulley system which, powered by an engine, slowly moves the items along their respective "tracks" from one fence to the other thus endowing the picturesque – if eclectic – scene of inhabitation with ambulatory quality.

Not unlike its precursors, *Mobile Home II* examines ideas of motionlessness and transience but arguably in a more dynamic way. Individually and in respect to one another the installation's objects simultaneously convey both meanings, beginning with the demarcating barriers that signify the edges of the artwork. Normally in the service of regulating and restricting movement, here they act as the walls of a dwelling but project porousness rather than enclosure and durability. Likewise, the ropes that connect the two obstacles are the conduits of the items' propulsion but in representing a washing line they function as indicators of domestic settledness, an impression underscored by the kitchen cloths held by the pegs and a notepad resting on top of the nearby stool as these items await their absent proprietor. Despite a certain visual charm, there lurks unease in the perpetually but slowly moving display of personal possessions. The more one observes the scene, the more disquieting it becomes: the chair and the table are sufficiently apart to thwart harmony and instead evoke estrangement and separation. The suitcases, upright and portentously primed for departure, serve as harbingers of impending change. This is a state of fluctuation and provisionality, a world of migration.

As much as by compositional confluence, one is struck by the contrasts in the two large-scale domestic pieces. *Mobile Home II* comprises mainly wood and textiles and an assorted collection of entirely unobjectionable, often decorative items – a substantial deviation from *Homebound*'s emphasis on sharp, seemingly discarded objects made of steel. While the latter's arrangement is poorly illuminated, the former features bright lighting which appears to dovetail with the softness and warmth of the materials. Although the sense of wholesome vivacity is undercut by the inference of a nomadic, itinerant existence, *Mobile*

*Home II* is clearly spared the immediate destructive presence of violence and war. And yet, whether in convergence or disparity, both works produce for their beholder a figurative flight towards home, a reflection on the meaning of habitation in a permanently shifting and unpredictable world.

For Sheena Wagstaff *Homebound* signifies an equivalent of ‘a stage set, the space for an incarcerated protagonist [which, however,] remains empty.’<sup>516</sup> Patricia Falguières goes a step further and compares it to a set ‘prepared for a bourgeois drama (Ibsen re-envisioned by some German director, Castorf or Ostermeier?).’<sup>517</sup> These associations with conventional theatre (that can readily be extended to *Mobile Home II*) invite us to examine the parallel to the domestic settings of Henrik Ibsen’s prose plays more closely. Espousing a similarly painstaking representation of material reality, typically achieved by way of a carefully premeditated spatial organisation of everyday objects, the dramatic worlds of Ibsen and Hatoum’s installations are pervaded with contemplations on inhabitation while also sharing the rigorous approach to the architectonics of space composition. Indeed, to grasp the full richness of the ideas put forth in Hatoum’s large-scale domestic pieces requires as comprehensive a description as Ibsen provides in the stage directions to his imagined homes, the layout of which is central to the development of the plots.

Michael Fried’s charge against installation art – at the time of his writing still a nascent movement – revolves around the fact that it typically exhibits everyday, known and typically large objects, promoting their material characteristics as features of art. His criticism of the theatre, however, stems from what he calls ‘the need to establish a drastically different relation to its audience’<sup>518</sup>, citing the influences of Artaud and Brecht in this regard. Fried’s views are perhaps emblematic of the time in which they were made, that is, the transition from modernism to postmodernism when the binary opposition was especially entrenched. While he appears to favour the modernist aesthetic, he seems to underestimate

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>517</sup> Patricia Falguières “Disbelonging” in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Christine van Assche and Clarrie Wallis (London: Tate Publishing, 2016), 68.

<sup>518</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 139.

the potential for installation art to grow or the theatre to transform and enrich itself. In fact, Fried's admonishment of installation, in particular, proved to have the opposite effect to the one he intended – it indirectly gave credence to the burgeoning set of experimental postmodern practices including performance and body art and secured a kind of legitimacy for installation as an independent art form.

Nevertheless, Fried's line of thinking provides a useful reference point for considering Ibsen's and Hatoum's examinations of home side by side. If installation renders the viewer as a subject to an 'object in a situation'<sup>519</sup> which creates, for Fried, an intrinsically theatrical affair, the proposition of the spectator as physically active while also psychologically receptive – a postmodernist tendency that Hatoum's work embraces – does not have an immediate equivalent in the modernist ideology of Ibsen's age. A century earlier, the dramatist relies only on the second component, stirring the viewer's emotions by subscribing to the convention of a division between a lit-up stage and a dimmed auditorium. Participation here is based on an internalising of the action, an encounter that does not involve the viewer's physical exposure in the same way though it carries psychological charge. It is, therefore, necessary to recognise that in the relationship between Ibsen and Hatoum the subject that Fried conceives of as inherent to their respective disciplines originates from two opposing conceptions of art but this does not compromise the dramaturgical connections between the pair's objectives.

Though Ibsen's drawing rooms are imagined with people in mind and it is their personal relationships that are at the forefront of attention, it would be wrong to discount the various assortments of cabinets, sliding doors and stoves he envisions as insignificant to the drama. A prominent attribute in the evolving action is their static constancy: as the lives of the characters become profoundly altered, the furnishings silently bear witness to the complications and reversals, weathering the dialogical storms, as it were, thereby strengthening the impact of the dramatic transformation, engaging the spectator in their own right. The closing scene in *A Doll's House* is a case in point: with Nora's departure Torvald

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 125.

is left in utter distress, the carefully arranged interior of the family home suddenly no longer the serene refuge from the world he believed he had created. The house turns into a place bereft of prior meaning, its emotional emptiness projecting solemnly from the continued presence of the armchairs, the bookcases and the carpets. What in performance is typically a brief moment before the final curtain fall harbours a profound affective meaning of home.

In Ibsen's prose oeuvre the change that takes place from the exposition to the resolution does not play out exclusively in the psychology of the characters: it is aided by, or even inscribed into, the drama's material properties. The combination serves the dramatist's aim to tease out the subtle, often unstated, suppressed anxieties associated with domestic daily life so as to prick at the complacency of the attitudes of the middle class of his time. In other words, Ibsen works from the distinctiveness of the experience of his contemporaneity to propose that the (bourgeois) ideal of home as exclusively the site of emotional anchorage and interpersonal harmony is fundamentally flawed. Within an entirely different set of historical circumstances, Mona Hatoum tackles similarly conflicted conceptions of home, responding to alarming acts of oppression to expose the romanticised image of habitational bliss as a rupture that divides those whose lives are imperilled by war and those fortunate to enjoy prosperity and peace. Through contrasting impulses Hatoum and Ibsen engage the audience to access a common theme: the multidimensional and permanently shifting nature of home.

Though, conversely to Ibsen, Hatoum's domestic pieces operate via the absence of a protagonist, they ignite tension by way of the prevailing features of their "settings" – in *Homebound* its vehicle is the emotional austerity of the dilapidated décor while in *Mobile Home II* it is the sense of the abode's fragility and impermanence. The wordless solitude of these dwellings holds, to follow Fried's vocabulary, 'anthropomorphic'<sup>520</sup> value and evokes the drama of humanity without the formal intermediaries of character and dialogue and it is from this laconicism that the magnitude of the "conflict" emanates. Adopting differing strategies but allied material means, the artists' approaches intersect in delivering to the

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 130.

spectator a contemplative sentence of home. Their use of the domestic elicits affective prompts that are analogous in how they trace a nuanced and multi-layered appreciation of the practices of making home and the modes of being at home.

### **The Arc of Objects**

While Ibsen's drama is visually defined by imposing fixtures and fittings, other trappings of the domestic such as smaller everyday objects also play a prominent role. Blending into the action rather unnoticeably, these may patiently await a brief moment of employment or only pass through a character's hands but even if fleetingly engaged they contribute to grounding the scene in a domestic reality. Whether it is opening a book, sorting through cutlery, pouring a drink or taking off a pair of gloves, facilitated by the requisite items such divergent acts accentuate the sense of habitational completeness as well as enhance the spectatorial immersion in the representational arrangement. The pile of papers on Borkman's desk serves to underline his bitterness and the desire to reclaim a high-ranking position of which he talks at length and somewhat absent-mindedly to his despondent visitor Vilhelm Foldal; the constantly shifting pots and pans in the Ekdal household foreground Gina's dedication to caring for her family and there is hardly a moment when she is free of work either through carrying trays of food, cleaning with a brush and duster or busying herself with the sewing kit. Ibsen's perhaps most notable interaction of character and object is, as examined in Chapter 1, Nora's struggle with the locked letter box containing the incriminating note from Krogstad which highlights her subjugation in the marriage, symbolising the suppression of women more broadly while strategically enhancing the tension, providing a prominent point of dramatic escalation.

Mona Hatoum's oeuvre includes a series of works that revolve around mundane domestic objects. Of varying proportions, these are self-standing sculptures in themselves and not, as with Ibsen, in a supporting, background function although they might strike us as the preliminary steps (or developmental stages) on the path to the elaborate and ambitious arrangements of *Homebound* and *Mobile Home II* – to stretch Wagstaff's theatrical analogy,

they can be considered as an accumulation of props building towards a full stage set. While eluding immediate correlation to drama, these post-minimalist pieces possess complex dramaturgical ingenuity in that they set up the idea of the domestic as a locus of comfort and safety which they then undercut and turn on its head, negating their primary aim. Such is the immediate impression with *Doormat* (1996). A familiar household item, commonly the first object encountered upon entering a home, Hatoum's rendition appears no different – it even, endearingly, includes the word “welcome”. A closer inspection reveals, however, that attached to its canvas base are two types of sharp steel pins which, if stepped on, could likely cause harm. The pins differ in length with the shorter ones arranged to spell out the cordial greeting so that an optical illusion is produced whereby the word is clearly visible from afar but becomes increasingly indistinguishable as one draws nearer. The act of approaching the mark of hospitality and personal warmth distorts the inviting gesture and invalidates it, thus purportedly creating a gulf between the host and the visitor – the two sides involved in the interpersonal exchange.

A similar tactic resurfaces in a further two pieces: the slightly larger *Pin Carpet* (1998) which, again made of steel, from a distance evokes a cosy, thickly-woven floor covering only to disclose its perilous jagged character once examined from close range, and the more culturally contentious *Prayer Mat* (1995). Hatoum's take on the traditional ornament in Muslim religious observance employs nickel-plated brass pins and features a compass to point its user to the east – the symbolic direction of the holy city of Mecca. The work perceptively intertwines comfort and discomfort: the mat is intended to aid and elevate the occasion of worship but the composition of needles prevents it, rendering the magnetic instrument redundant. In corresponding fashion, *Entrails Carpet* (1995) achieves the visual appeal through the use of silicon rubber, creating a seductively shiny texture but its bowel-like arrangement (or could it be a proliferation of enlarged larvae?) comes across as unsettlingly visceral, undermining the functionality and aesthetic attributes of domestic decoration.

The theme of contradicting intentions prominently extends to kitchen utensils. *No Way* and *No Way III* (both 1996) involve a slotted spoon and a colander. The perforations of these steel implements are purposefully blocked to prevent the passage of liquid that is essential to their customary domestic usage. Turned upside down, the colander resembles a soldier's helmet and thus joins the associations of nourishment and war to project images of violence and starvation. To this thread belongs a pair of metal sculptures inspired by graters – *Grater Divide* (2002) and *Daybed* (2008). Both enlarged versions of the item, the former serves as a combined three-piece screen meant to partition an enclosed space into smaller sections. Each of the sides comprises a different slicing function as the divider leaves an unusually aggressive, eerie sensation – the effect also achieved by the coarse vegetable-grater surface of the couch in *Daybed*, a gracefully appointed but unnerving piece of furniture.

An additional dimension of Hatoum's examination of individual domestic objects is the series of cots and beds that explore ideas of repose. *Incommunicado* (1993), *Silence* (1994) and *First Step* (1996) are cradle sculptures made of steel, glass and wood respectively. Although visually engaging, they are characterized by the minimalist aesthetic of simplicity of form and geometric precision and a certain bareness by only displaying the frame. *Incommunicado* features metal wires at the base of the cot thus juxtaposing the object's purpose and its traditional role in the tender phase of infancy with the threat of physical harm. *Silence* carries the same sense of hazard and, made of thin glass, mixes it with the connotation of fragility. By contrast, the wooden *First Step* proposes a period piece with wheels attached to the metal base and a sprinkling of icing sugar next to it on the floor, the light, fairy-like dust evoking innocence as well as the act of nurturing to recall another integral aspect of motherhood.

The collection of beds is arguably more varied. *Lily (Stay) Put* (1996), a rusted metal bed frame, brings to mind a punitive setting, the wheels at the foot of the structure adding an ironic suggestion to counter internment. Created in the same year, the elegant *Divan Bed* constitutes yet another piece governed by cold steel. From afar it produces the image of



sumptuous comfort only for it to be refused as the hard, unforgiving metal surface becomes apparent. By contrast, *Marrow* (1996) is made of rubber and represents a bed frame collapsed into itself as if entirely worn out with use or affected by some sort of malfunction. Of no palpable practical benefit, the shrunken frame ostensibly continues to bear significance – like marrow, the life-giving soft substance in the cavities of the bones in which blood cells are produced. Following this analogy, we might conjecture that the bed is the marrow of the home, the source of one's continual re-invigoration through rest and sleep – though admittedly privileges unavailable in the world of Mona Hatoum.

From doormats to beds, from kitchen utensils to carpets, the melange of Hatoum's domestic objects seems to encompass an entire household out of which one might curate a site-specific promenade performance themed on the perpetual renunciation of affirming habitation. Throughout this sequence of the oeuvre, which spans several years, Hatoum follows an unswerving dramaturgical trajectory. The point of departure – the exposition – is an instantly recognisable domestic item, typically part of the daily practice of inhabitation and evoking a familiar routine or a memory. This, to continue in theatrical vein, is followed by a rapid succession of rising action, escalation and falling action into a denouement which brings about a significant, often unforeseen transformation. Its meaning now altered, the object establishes a dramatic arc, a kind of diminutive version of Gustav Freytag's pyramid structure, the traditional (and also Ibsen's) model of drama. In his 1863 study, Freytag writes that

drama possesses – if one may symbolize its arrangement by lines – a pyramidal structure. It rises from the *introduction* with the entrance of the exciting forces to the *climax*, and falls from here to the *catastrophic*. Between these three parts lie (the parts of) the *rise* and the *fall*. Each of these five parts may consist of a single scene, or a succession of connected scenes, but the climax is usually composed of one chief scene. These parts of the drama, a) introduction, b) rise, c) climax, d) return or fall, e)

catastrophe, have each what is peculiar in purpose and in construction. Between them stand three important scenic effects, through which the parts are separated as well as bound together. Of these three dramatic moments, or crises, one which indicates the beginning of the stirring action, stands between the introduction and the rise; the second, the beginning of the counter-action, between the climax and the return; the third, which must rise once more before the catastrophe, between the return and the catastrophe.<sup>521</sup>

Linking installation (but also instances of minimalist sculpture) and theatre in this way recalls Michael Fried's disparaging critique of the former as a 'hollow'<sup>522</sup> art form, one which is 'inexhaustible [...] because there is nothing there to exhaust'<sup>523</sup> and in this sense 'endless'<sup>524</sup> since it is a temporal rather than a plastic art. The experience of theatre too is dependent on duration in order for its meaning to unfold and be absorbed. In the process theatre isolates as well as 'confronts the beholder with [...] the endlessness [...] of time'<sup>525</sup> which, Fried believes, is not a quality that art should aspire to, proffering instead that 'a single infinitely brief instant [should] be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness'<sup>526</sup>.

In opposition to the condemnation of installation as artistically insignificant on account of its association with the theatre and, furthermore, of theatre for being an event fundamentally predicated on the passing of time, the treatment of home in Ibsen and Hatoum uncovers meaningful connections. Subjected to Hatoum's sensibility, the material culture of the domestic gathers attributes of great emotional magnitude and condenses them into dramatic miniatures of home that resonate with Ibsen's theatre tradition. As home traverses diverse histories and modes of practice, it highlights the persistence of habitational

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<sup>521</sup> Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama: an Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, transl. Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1900), 114-5.

<sup>522</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 119.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 143-4.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 146.

awareness and its foundational importance in construction of personal identity. On display here is the performative character of home, its ability to transform ways of thinking and doing across and within geographical scales.

### **Degrees of Sensing Home: Reflection, Agency, Destruction**

At first glance, *Bukhara* (2007) suggests another in the rich collection of Hatoum's household objects. It involves a traditional oriental rug with motifs arranged in geometric repetition. Visibly tattered, the decorative surface is scraped in places, revealing the rough fibres underneath in shapes that portray the map of the entire world. Here is a miniature of home at its most concise: a personal possession that symbolically incorporates the enormity of the earth in a coming together of two forms of representation central to the work of Mona Hatoum – the domestic and mapping. Positioned in such close contact, within a single piece, they form distinct but also interrelated expressions of inhabitation, performativities of home that invariably engage the spectator in negotiating between the perceptions of home as a localised architectural unit and the environment at large.

While in *Bukhara* these two performative expressions of home interact with great effect in visual terms, their overlap extends over a series of works and holds an important place in the artist's oeuvre. What is more, it establishes a conceptual correspondence with the dramatic strategies of Henrik Ibsen but before examining these intertwinements, the dramaturgy of Hatoum's maps (and mappings) should be considered separately, as a formal and thematic cluster comprising what might be described as degrees of sensing home. *Bukhara*, of the first degree, imagines the world in unexpected and counterintuitive ways: its exposed threads clash with the soft patterning in such a manner that the delicate upper layer signifies the oceans while the rug's inner texture depicts the landmasses. This creates a disconcerting image of the continents submerged into the vast expanses of the sea, a troubling vision of the future or, conceivably, a deliberate disruption of cartographic conventions to challenge, and look beyond, established truths. An earlier piece *Projection* (2006) follows a similar course of thought. Made from cotton and the abaca plant (the fibres

of which are used in paper products), the soft white surface is indented to outline on a slightly darker, beige background the world's continents as if they have been, in the words of the artist, 'eroded or are sinking into the sea.'<sup>527</sup> The smooth features of the cotton resemble a warm quilt or a thick blanket of snow to counteract the threat of submersion with a blend of comfort and stillness. Not unlike Hatoum's domestic object these maps simultaneously give rise to feelings of disquiet and ease but avoid the impulse to explicitly polemicize the ideological implications of map-making in preference to encouraging active deliberation on the part of the viewer, a reflective mood – a potent form, degree, of sensing home.

An analogous mixture of fragility and peril marks two of Hatoum's large scale map works which share not only the artistic intent but also the materials used in their creation. The plainly titled *Map* (1999) comprises a profusion of small glass marbles the arrangement of which, as originally conceived, fills up a deliberately uneven floor of an entire gallery space in a representation of the earth's surface. Visitors seem to be invited to approach the exhibit as well as walk through parts of it, thus allowing for the possibility of the marbles becoming dislodged. While spectatorial participation of this kind, a feature of avant-garde creative practices, may alter the artwork's envisaged layout, it is also its crucial component: in determining whether their movements distort the careful positioning, the viewer adopts a certain influence over the composition, becomes aware of their own expressivity, but this feeling of control inherently incorporates the responsibility for the ensuing consequences. The precariousness generated as the miniscule marbles roll off on their own trajectories under the weight of a spectator's steps brings about the impression that the world exists in a delicate balance and the actions of the humankind hold sway over its stability.

The relationship between a purportedly vulnerable world and the governing human race is revisited over a decade later in *Tectonic* (2010), a map stretched across glass plates of equal size which combine into a large square. Spread on the floor, the thin panels are

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<sup>527</sup> Serpentine Galleries, "Mona Hatoum – Mappings", Vimeo, 24:03, 1 June, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/24541176> (paper presented at The Serpentine Gallery Map Marathon, London, 17 October, 2010).

transparent almost to the point of invisibility and easily breakable – even the slightest contact might damage the piece.<sup>528</sup> This sets up anew the suggestion of people’s ruinous nature to which the landmasses are prey. Capturing the notion of human agency within the cartographic representation of the earth formulates the second degree of sensing home – *Map* and *Tectonic* deliver a message which carries political (including environmental) resonance in proposing that the future of the earth is contingent upon the (mis)deeds of those who inhabit it.

Employing maps to incite reflection on, and examine our own participation in, the ways we conceive of habitation, Hatoum completes the scale of the degrees of sensing home with the modality of destruction. *Shift* (2012) is a carpet made of wool that has been cut up into eight pieces of more or less the same size and seemingly stitched back in haste, leaving the edges misaligned. On a grey background rests the map of the world, in black, the continuity of its surface broken up by the object’s skewed (re-)arrangement. The map is overlaid with yellow concentric circles denoting a danger warning, feasibly forestalling a catastrophe. While formal similarities with *Bukhara* are difficult to overlook, *Shift* appears to, nevertheless, present a world that is distinctly more troubled and unstable. The glaring hue of the seismic waves arguably has more in common with the ominous red glow of the spherical *Hot Spot* and its inescapable sense of a condemnatory judgement on the world. *Shift* amalgamates threat and vulnerability as a premonition of calamity that the soft texture of the wool it is made up of is unable to counterpoint and – like *Hot Spot* – bestows no deliverance on the world, the home of the humankind.

Insistence on contemplation, appeal for meaningful collective and individual engagement and the imminent threat of devastation formulate the prevalent themes of Mona Hatoum’s mappings and evoke the familiar tropes of her enduring examination of the notion of home across a variety of media. Significantly, the land portrayed on the maps persistently lacks the designation of borders. The frequent denial of the political divisions suggests a

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<sup>528</sup> Hatoum recounted of such an occurrence at her exhibition in Beirut in her paper at The Serpentine Gallery Map Marathon (as above).

longing for a world in which the consciousness of habitation exists unburdened by nationally-charged strife. This intention is echoed further in her approach to mapping – Hatoum opts for the so-called Peters-Gall projection, a cartographic technique which came to prominence in the 1970s when its author Arno Peters revived (and refined) the work of scholar James Gall from a century prior. Proposing an alternative to the widely used Mercator projection<sup>529</sup>, which dates back to the time of the European colonial conquests, Peters argued that his own method provides a more accurate representation of the spatial relationships between the various territories of the world: Mercator's formula favours the North Atlantic region, proportionately amplifying parts of Europe while incorrectly reducing the size of large areas of the developing world. According to Peters, this distortion fulfils the function of perpetuating the history of cultural imperialism and although his theory continues to be disputed it is easy to understand why it would appeal to Hatoum's identity of the culturally marginal, postcolonial artist.

There exists a seamless intertwining of the intimate and the global in these mapping projects, a reminder that home is a multivalent concept, a confluence of numerous expressions. It is a theme explored by Henrik Ibsen in his prose plays, notably *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman* where he expands the meaning of home beyond the architectural confines of the domestic sphere, prompting, much like Mona Hatoum, environmental and political overtones. In *The Wild Duck*, as the preceding chapter argues, this is primarily achieved through the figure of the loft, the spare room in the Ekdal family household – the play's main setting – filled with used Christmas trees and stacks of hay where pouters, rabbits and, of course, the wild duck have found refuge. The space, which is never fully revealed on stage, serves as a make-believe forest and provides a divertissement for the ailing and socially withdrawn old Ekdal who spends most of his time there pretending to hunt. It is something of a pitiful substitute for the vast expanses of forestland he once owned with his business partner Werle until trade errors were committed that

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<sup>529</sup> Named after 16<sup>th</sup> century geographer Gerardus Mercator. See Andrew Taylor, *The World of Gerard Mercator: The Mapmaker Who Revolutionized Geography* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

resulted in Ekdal's imprisonment. Unable to recover from this blow – financially or psychologically – old Ekdal and his son Hjalmar's family have led a meagre existence, diametrically contrasted to the opulent lives of the Werles who continued to profit from the timber venture (as well as enjoy the thrill of hunting expeditions). The play juxtaposes the differing circumstances of the two families on several levels, most emphatically through the contrasted interior decoration of their dwellings, but the loft and the recurring references to the Hoydal forests construct a powerful, ever-present theme of the humans' relationship to nature as alienated and careless. The continued cutting of the trees is presented as an act of collective improvidence which the woods will avenge and retribution ultimately strikes in the most tragic way as, concealed from the audience's view while in the loft, young Hedvig Ekdal dies from a self-inflicted shot wound.

In *John Gabriel Borkman*, the skilful meshing of the domestic and the outer world as two parallel performative expressions of home is predicated on the title character's reinvigorated vision of the world he held many years prior, while at the height of his banking career. Now a jaded individual, Borkman is secluded to the solitude of the family villa after serving a prison sentence for embezzlement, when he suddenly and impulsively leaves the residence on a cold winter night. Walking into a forest he is determined to reclaim his dream of the 'infinite, inexhaustible kingdom'<sup>530</sup>, a society held together by prosperity and unity among people. He reaches a clearing from which the view of the valley opens up and he imagines his kingdom stretching throughout the distant landscapes – ostensibly miniaturizing them into his ideological concept. This land of solidarity and collective progress is in stark contrast to the unhappy household in which Borkman has lived with his estranged wife and which their son has decided to abandon. It remains for John Gabriel an unattained dream. Moments after uttering it, he dies – as if to pass, like so often Mona Hatoum in her works, a dooming judgement on the notion of a stable, harmonious sense of home.

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<sup>530</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Four: Pillars of Society, John Gabriel Borkman, When We Dead Awaken*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 199.

## Part IV

### An Unending Spectacle

A discussion on home and the transportive qualities in the art of Mona Hatoum would not be complete without considering her inaugural cartographic installation *Present Tense* which unleashed the rich series of map(ping) projects and perhaps more than any of her other works requires a comprehensive elucidation of its conception. The piece represents the re-emergence of the autobiographic component introduced in *Measures of Distance* almost a decade earlier, enabling the viewer to relate its meaning to a particular moment in history. To fully appreciate this context is to immerse oneself into the complexity of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, one of the lengthiest political impasses of recent history, and to recognise its layered global resonance. This latter element in particular opens the artwork to the spectator in a profoundly reflective way. It jostles them into the clamour of military riots, cultural tensions and diplomatic disputes, a cacophony of opposing voices which bears upon one of humanity's most pressing questions of home, making the intimate journey of the art-goer inseparable from the strained politics of the situation.

If *Measures of Distance* frequently serves as a gateway to interpretations of Hatoum on account of the revelations from her private life (as in the case of this chapter), *Present Tense* leaves the sharing of familial attachments aside to reflect on home as a joint entity of a people, bringing a new shade of subtleness to the urgency of the artist's poetics. The work represents Hatoum's encounter with her heritage as she draws on the political events in her parents' former homeland in the mid-1990s – the time of her first visit (through a residency in Jerusalem) and a period of considerable shifts in the relationship between the two sides. Hatoum remodels the map of the Oslo Accords (1993), then commonly viewed as a historic advancement in establishing stability in the region but ultimately acknowledged as one more in a string of unsuccessful peace-making efforts. The bilateral agreement followed years of protracted mediation which led to both parties mutually recognizing each other as formal



entities in the negotiating process that would endeavour to, among other, address the issue of borders between them.

The resulting map proposed a highly complex division of land in which the continuity of boundary lines was repeatedly broken up. This produced a territory composed of scattered, isolated pockets of one entity within the other, an outcome that seemed to lack spatial cohesion – arguably a vital precondition to the prospect of self-government. Hatoum's installation does not reproduce the full map to her preferred scale but rather focuses on the terrain apportioned to the Palestinian jurisdiction. She creates the map's surface by lining up two thousand pieces of soap into which she plants red colour glass shards that demarcate the land. The soap derives from the city of Nablus in northern West Bank and represents the traditional industry of Palestine economy that has withstood the upheaval of confrontation and the immanent threat of destruction. A powerful symbol of endurance, it remains a sought-after and valued product across the Middle East and the Arab World and is made from olive oil, another important commodity in the history of the people. The glass beads that cut into the soap unsettle its smooth texture but the substance responds to these incursions with resistance. It accommodates the sharp edges as an act of defiance. Their red hue is reminiscent of, as Najat Rahman, comparative literature scholar of Middle-Eastern origin, has recorded, 'blood drops',<sup>531</sup> evoking, on the one hand, the tragic destiny of the population trapped in the violence and, on the other, blood as an essential constituent of life, lifeblood – the ever-pulsating force of existence.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians must necessarily be extended beyond the confines of the troubled territory and considered in the light of a succession of failed diplomatic as well as humanitarian efforts by the international community. The decades-long inability of the United Nations (UN) to contribute to a form of constructive and durable consensus between the parties suggests that accountability in the dispute rests just as much on the shoulders of the developed world. As political scientist Bruce D. Jones

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<sup>531</sup> Najat Rahman, *In the Wake of the Poetic: Palestinian Artists after Darwish* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 95.

writes in his analysis of the UN's proceedings, '[m]ore vetoes have been cast in the Security Council on this issue than any other – nearly as many as on all other issues combined'<sup>532</sup>, often involving 'high-level deliberations in and between Washington, London, Moscow and Paris.'<sup>533</sup> With no tangible strategy in sight to end the stand-off it seems that its dimensions might not diminish for some time, not least as the neighbouring countries and, in fact, the region as a whole sink deeper into disorder. To peel away the layers of the Israeli-Palestine prolonged armed struggle, look deeper than the hostilities, the political wrangling and religious fervour, is to arrive at a twofold narrative of home emanating from a rudimentary or even instinctual human need to belong – and also a narrative which involves some of the world's largest theological traditions. The founders of the Zionist movement at the end of the nineteenth century articulated this desire by imagining the birth of a nation state that would provide a place for Jews scattered around the world. Leon Pinsker, a pioneer activist for the cause, famously declared that the 'Jewish people has no fatherland of its own, [...] no center of focus or gravity, no government of its own, no official representation. They home everywhere but are nowhere at home.'<sup>534</sup> This contention reflects the kind of determination that propelled half a century of persuasive campaigning and diplomacy as well as moments of resolute insurgence, all culminating in the establishment of the internationally recognised sovereign state of Israel shortly after the Second World War.

It followed a wave of immigration to Palestine primarily of Jews from Europe but also other parts of the globe and signalled a kind of closure to a history of displacement and persecution – from its biblical beginnings to the brutality of the Holocaust. From Moses' wanderings through the desert to reach the Promised Land, to the later conquests of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and, further on, of the Romans<sup>535</sup> which robbed the people of their freedom and subjected them to deportation, to centuries of diasporic existence in

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<sup>532</sup> Bruce D. Jones: "The Security Council and the Arab-Israeli Wars: Responsibility without Power" in *The United Nations Security Council and War: the Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*, ed. Vaughan Lowe et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 298.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>534</sup> Lion Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*, trans. D.S. Blondheim (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1947), 4.

<sup>535</sup> 586 BCE and 70 CE respectively. See Steven Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Christian Europe and the Islamic Orient. Notwithstanding threats of banishment, restrictions of movement and prohibition of trade, the Jewish culture retained the core of its identity, boasting achievements in theological thought, philosophy and literature along the way as well as a prosperous economy. A uniting element to the persevering consciousness was the potent trope of home: the hope of the restoration of the Holy Land with Jerusalem at its heart. The devastating cruelty of Hitler's fascism which reduced the world's Jewish population by millions only strengthened the resolve and accelerated the nation-building process as internment camps were left behind for voyages across the Mediterranean Sea to the desired, sacred place of origin.

The history of the making of modern Israel is, however, also the unmaking of Palestine, that is, the dislodgement of an Arab people that inhabited that very land for centuries. Largely an agricultural society and the only territory in the region not to be granted independence from the colonial overlords, the Palestinians were in disbelief that their home could be taken away from them by the arriving settlers. The community lacked the resources and institutions of the First World – the tools that had enabled the campaigners of Zionism to prepare the juridical and political ground for the creation of Israel – as well as sustained support of the neighbouring Arab countries. They were, in the words of Edward Said, 'turned into exiles by the proverbial people of exile, the Jews. [...] It is as if the reconstructed Jewish collective experience [...] could not tolerate another story of dispossession and loss to exist alongside it.'<sup>536</sup>

Thus a counter-narrative of home was born and continues to unfold to this day – in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in the refugee camps of Lebanon and Jordan. It consists of perseverance and, above all, the yearning to return, that is, ironically, the same properties that drove the founding of modern Israel. For Mahmoud Darwish, the celebrated Palestinian author, in his poem "I Belong There" home represents the constitutive unit of language, what remains after one has exhausted the capacity for both emotion and reason:

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<sup>536</sup> Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 178.

I belong there. I have many memories.

[...]

I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.

I belong there. [...]

To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.

I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a  
single word: Home.<sup>537</sup>

A poet lives off words, consumes them, interrogates them and pulls them apart but home is the one word that defies Darwish's scrutiny. Its mere utterance is called upon to stir up the disassembled existence and preserve the hope that the loss will be mended. Neglecting such impassioned appeals, recent history has muffled the emotional argument put forth by the Palestinians in support of their claim to the territory, employing instead the detached and restrained diction of international law shaped by geostrategic appetites in the region which appear to have only perpetuated the bloodshed. Many of Mona Hatoum's early works share the committed tenor of Darwish's verse and *Present Tense* is no exception although in comparison to the poet's probing, the installation arguably penetrates further.

Hatoum parses, in visual terms, the meaning of home through questioning the marking of its proposed dimensions. She creates a powerful image filled with symbolism. The Nablus soap connotes the collective character of a people as well a sense of intimacy in evoking the act of bathing (a curious parallel to *Measures of Distance*) and thus intertwines the spheres of the public and the private. The unavoidable lingering question that arises is what happens once the washing substance runs out? The territory "gives in" and the lines of separation disappear. Hatoum undermines the meaning of borders as a signifier of home by subjecting the surface on which they exact the division of land to dissolution. Nothing but

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<sup>537</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*, trans. Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 7.

the sharp-edged glass remains as the portent of ruin – where violence has wrested humanity only harm is left to endure. Indeed, the resonance of *Present Tense* has stretched into the work's future and over two decades since its creation, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not abated: the present is equally, if not more, tense.

The use of the sparest of material means to condense a charged history and a particularly difficult state of affairs into a seemingly simplistic arrangement sustains Hatoum's search for a (post-) minimalist (and miniature) aesthetic and suggests that within this ingenuity rests a haunting vision of the world as a place of unending struggle. The map that carried the promise of Palestinian statehood emerges as another in a succession of missteps on the path to appeasement. The artist counters this apparent absence of reconciliation with a mere bar of soap, standing up to hostility by recalling intimacy and domesticity. The evocative value of the soap was evinced in the reactions of the installation's first audiences at the Anadiel Gallery in East Jerusalem, many of whom were Jewish and linked the image to the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps in which the Germans were believed to manufacture soap from the corpses of the deceased.<sup>538</sup> What stands out from this interpretation is how it derives from a historical moment that, in spite of its undeniable cruelty, provides an affirmation of Jewish belonging. Hatoum's employment of the Nablus soap serves to honour centuries of tradition and community and therefore, in its essence, originates from the same impulse of wanting (a place) to belong – suddenly and briefly, an artwork enables two opposing sides to contemplate what they hold in common rather than what separates them.

Hatoum has said, 'I don't think any artist's work is going to move armies. [...] If the work creates an awareness of certain issues, a questioning in the mind of a spectator of certain assumptions, then that's something – I don't think an artwork will provoke political action.'<sup>539</sup> A reassessment of the statement twenty years after the creation of *Present Tense* confirms the artist's belief: Israel and Palestine continue to seek a way to solve the conflict,

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<sup>538</sup> See Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 142.

<sup>539</sup> Mona Hatoum, "Artist's Writings" in *Mona Hatoum*, eds. Michael Archer, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher (London: Phaidon, 1997), 127.

despite substantial involvement of the United Nations. While Hatoum recognizes the inability of art to effect actual political change politics seems – paradoxically – to be turning to art to express its vision for finding a solution. Anticipating the practical limitations for the execution of the Oslo Accords, then American President Clinton welcomed the cartographic proposal with an air of jubilation which was tinged with a tacit acknowledgment of the immensity of the challenge at hand. He proclaimed the treaty as an

extraordinary act in one of history's defining dramas, a drama that began in the time of our ancestors when the word went forth from a sliver of land between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. That hallowed piece of earth, that land of light and revelation is the home to the memories and dreams of Jews, Muslims, and Christians throughout the world.<sup>540</sup>

Appealing to the shared cross-cultural reverence towards the disputed territory, Clinton appears to concede that the ownership of the conflict is global as opposed to solely regional. Framing his argument within the model of drama, the politician exploits art to aid his rhetoric and sets up an uncanny (even diametrical) subversion of Hatoum's position. Recourse to the vocabulary of the theatre is necessarily calibrated to avoid committing to an outcome. Conveniently, the signing of the agreement represents merely an 'act' rather than the resolution. Like the strife, so too, the search for reconciliation is rendered into a spectacle. Significantly, its viewer and actor are one and the same: us, the international community at large. In this perversion of the theatrical occasion what is actually at stake in the encounter – the question of home (for both Israel and Palestine) – is entirely forgotten, the matrix of drama corrupted and the conclusion perpetually distant or even absent, as if non-existent by design.

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<sup>540</sup> Bill Clinton, *The Clinton Foreign Policy Reader: Presidential Speeches with Commentary*, eds. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, Albina Shayevich, and Boris Zlotnikov (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 210.

With (international) politics failing to mend misfortune, art may yet inspire a way forward. Not unlike Clinton, but arguably with more candid intent, the renowned Israeli writer Amos Oz borrows from the lexicon of the theatre to offer an assuaging perspective:

Tragedies can be resolved in one of two ways: there is the Shakespearean resolution and there is the Chekhovian one. At the end of a Shakespearean tragedy, the stage is strewn with dead bodies and maybe there's some justice hovering high above. A Chekhov tragedy, on the other hand, ends with everybody disillusioned, embittered, heartbroken, disappointed, absolutely shattered, but still alive. And I want a Chekhovian resolution, not a Shakespearean one, for the Israeli/Palestine tragedy.<sup>541</sup>

To this distinguished company in search of harmonious accord, we should submit the artistic vision of Mona Hatoum – not to seek a higher just cause in tragic loss of life, nor to dwell in disconsolance but to uphold a commitment to reflection that puts at its heart the affective value of home. In doing so, we can, by extension, add to this assembly the Ibsenite version. His imagined homes of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie may be a century and more removed from the time of Hatoum but in them surges an abiding awareness of inhabitation. From their explorations of the meaning, home springs a perpetual appraisal of how we dwell, how we feel and connect with our surroundings.

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Making one's way through Hatoum's 2016 exhibition at the Tate Modern, one enters a room-size installation *Interior/Exterior Landscape* (2010), a kind of culmination of Hatoum's intertwinement of the material culture of home and mapping. It involves another furnished personal space and, unusually, it is one that the viewer is able to enter. Small and modest, the room features a bed frame at one end and a table with a chair in the other while

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<sup>541</sup> Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1993), 260.

installed on opposite walls are a birdcage and a coat rack under which is a small stool. This ascetic composition is carefully balanced: the frame of the bed and the coat rack are to the front of the room and parallel to each other, both made of metal; the birdcage, table and chair are at the back, similarly side by side and made of wood, as is the stool. The presence of cartography in the frugal setting is somewhat discreet – hanging from the rack are a shopping bag and two clothes hangers in the shape of a circle and it takes a moment to appreciate that the bag has been cut out of a map of the world while the round hangers are symbolic representations of the Eastern and the Western hemispheres. A used paper plate has been left on the stool, still seemingly showing marks of the food that was placed on it but, in fact, the “stain” resembles a map of the world. A pillow on the bed offers yet another allusion to maps as it is embroidered with hair in shapes that are reminiscent of the flight paths between various cities, the idea previously explored in *Routes*. Hair, a recurrent motif in Hatoum’s oeuvre, arranged in threads, is also used in place of the base of the bed, suggesting that the structure may not be sturdy enough to provide repose just as the wooden chair cannot for it is curiously conjoined with the table.

Once more in the creative realm of Mona Hatoum we are presented with a domestic space but denied a home. It eludes us as we familiarize ourselves with its features. The objects that initially exude solidity are revealed to us as defective or unreliable. In the realisation of this clash of contrasts, the habitational sentence scatters, stability is replaced by insecurity. We go away feeling that home may not only have evaded us but that it is actually unattainable, an impossibility.



## Housework, Food, Feminism: Henrik Ibsen and Bobby Baker

### Foreword

Bobby Baker's critique of home draws on a feminist perspective; in particular, it can be situated (intellectually and temporally) within materialist feminism. This movement is closely associated with socialist feminism which came to prominence in the Western world as part of the counter-culture revolution of the 1960s, alongside other civil rights movements of the leftist political provenance. As scholars Susan Ferguson and David McNally write in their Introduction to the re-publication of sociologist Lise Vogel's book *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (2016), 'social feminists were largely united by a commitment to understanding women's oppression as grounded in socio-material relations intrinsic to capitalism, rather than as simple products of attitudes, ideologies, and behaviours.'<sup>542</sup> The distinguishing element of the materialist branch of feminism is its engagement with the theories of philosopher Karl Marx in works such as *Das Kapital* (1867) which provided the intellectual framework for their own concepts and initiatives.

Marx's influential writings stemmed from his observation of the growing industrialisation in nineteenth-century Europe. He developed what Jon Elster in *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (1986) has called 'an empirical theory of history [...] which has come to be known as historical materialism'<sup>543</sup>. The theory is an investigation of 'the historical class societies'<sup>544</sup>, writes Elster, more specifically, it is 'a general theory of the structure and dynamics'<sup>545</sup> of modes of human production and 'of the historical sequence'<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Susan Ferguson and David McNally, "Capital Labour-Power and Gender Relations: Introduction to the Historical Materialism Edition of *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*" in Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), xviii.

<sup>543</sup> Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 103.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*

of these modes. Here is how Ferguson and McNally describe the German philosopher's followers: 'To be a Marxist is to delve into the realm of the concrete, historically-constructed relationships of people and things, and to hold up the patterns, rules, and contradictions discovered in that realm as critical explanations of the social.'<sup>547</sup>

Marx's particular interest was capitalism, the epoch of his own contemporary time, and its systems for the production of labour. A major feminist issue of the late 1960s was women's domestic labour – a debate that had also preoccupied the preceding generation of feminists (as I shall show later) – and as Ferguson and McNally suggest, this 'debate crystallised the quest to locate the socio-material foundations of women's oppression in the terms and concepts of Marxian political economy.'<sup>548</sup> The materialist feminists argued that the operational circuits of capitalism exert a complete lack of recognition for the significance of housework which rests largely on women's shoulders. Or as Ferguson and McNally summarize the vital point made in one of the most important studies of the time, Margaret Benson's article "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" (1969): 'without domestic labour, workers cannot reproduce themselves; and without workers, capital cannot be reproduced.'<sup>549</sup>

As we shall see, women's domestic labour is a central theme in the work of Bobby Baker and her art can be understood better when viewed in the context of the postulates of materialist feminism. This is not only on account of the questions of housework she grapples with in her performance pieces but also from the perspective of being a female practitioner of art. Women artists have long occupied – and continue to – a more precarious (social) position than their male counterparts. In *The Invention of Art* (2001), Larry Shiner offers a cultural history of the conceptualisation of art as we comprehend it today and writes that 'in the eighteenth century a fateful division occurred in the traditional concept of art [...], generating the new category of fine arts (poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, music) as

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<sup>547</sup> Susan Ferguson and David McNally, "Capital Labour-Power and Gender Relations: Introduction to the Historical Materialism Edition of Marxism and the Oppression of Women" in Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), xvii-xix.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

opposed to crafts and popular arts (shoemaking, embroidery, storytelling, popular songs).<sup>550</sup> The fine arts became ‘a matter of inspiration and genius and meant to be enjoyed by themselves in moments of refined pleasure’<sup>551</sup> as opposed to craft and popular arts which were ‘meant for mere use or entertainment.’<sup>552</sup> One consequence of the shift was that the (fine) artist gained distinct social prestige that was unattainable to those specialising in a particular (trade) skill. Another was that art started to be associated with a particular set of (cultured) behaviours and gradually became institutionalised. It led to a change in how art was supported financially – what happened was ‘the replacement of [the] patronage [system] by an art market and a middle-class art public.’<sup>553</sup> Such “market environment” created the need ‘to elevate some genres to the spiritual status of fine art and their producers to heroic creators while relegating other genres to the status of mere utility and their producers to fabricators.’<sup>554</sup>

However, as Shiner perceptively notes, such a process raises very problematic social implications: ‘when the genres and activities chosen for elevation and those chosen for demotion reinforce race, class, and gender lines, what once looked like a purely conceptual change begins to look like an underwriting of power relations.’<sup>555</sup> From a feminist perspective, the task, in Shiner’s words, ‘to overcome a long-standing gender bias of the fine art system’<sup>556</sup> has been – and continues to be – an ongoing struggle. Baker’s own struggle in this respect has been exacerbated by her “stepping out” of the capitalist structures to be a full-time parent and housewife and then returning to a career as artist. As this chapter will show, her examination of home is inherently also a critical engagement with the gendered principles of artistic production that limit opportunities for women artists.

This locates Baker within the broader critique of the relationship of women and the category of art. Drawing on the work of American scholar attention Kathy Battista, I list two

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<sup>550</sup> Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

examples of feminist art practice that, like Baker, can be considered part of this critique. The first is Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1979), a process-based work which draws on psychoanalysis. It involves a carefully maintained archive of the development of Kelly's new-born son from infancy to nursery, including diagrams and the author's diary entries. From basic bodily functions such as food intake, digestion and excretion to the gradual mastery of language, the parent-child relationship emerges as an experience of reciprocal learning in which the son's journey from complete dependency to evolving curiosity and greater self-awareness is an equally transformative and illuminating event for the attentive mother.<sup>557</sup> Kelly's psychoanalytical focus on the offspring also proposes a political interpretation of parenthood as a forcibly female purview, a means of confining women to the home and limiting their exposure to the public sphere. From this perspective, the effort expended into mothering can be seen as unnoticed with the complexities of rearing children and the accompanying practical challenges considered a pervasive, yet somehow inconsequential kind of rite of passage restricted exclusively to women.

The second example is a project called *Portrait of an Artist as a Housewife* (1975) which involved a creative exchange of artworks of various forms (and formats) through the post. Initiated by Kate Walker and Sally Gallop the epistolary performance eventually comprised up to eighty women artists, many of whom had taken a break from the profession to raise a family. Their sharing of gifts – mostly small handcrafts or short literary pieces – underscored the locational and temporal constraint imposed by caring for the wellbeing of the household and acted as a substitute for meeting in person. The particular significance of this kind of a creative venture for the struggling and overburdened mothers was that it, in Walker's words (as recorded by Battista), 'was almost akin to a social life. [...] One gained friends through that.'<sup>558</sup> The spatially granulated dramaturgy of postal interactions varyingly proposes the home as the site of creativity and oppression – a tension which Baker has

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<sup>557</sup> See Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013).

<sup>558</sup> Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013), 109.

tackled on a number of occasions, not least, as we shall see later, by locating art in her own home.

### **Bobby Baker Meets Henrik Ibsen**

This chapter examines the manifold performative expressions of home in Henrik Ibsen's naturalistic drama in relation to the work of the performance artist Bobby Baker, specifically the performance pieces *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, *Cook Dems* and *Kitchen Show* which occupy a prominent position in Baker's oeuvre. Developed in short succession, they mark her return to working as an artist, following an absence of eight years during which her full-time focus was raising her daughter and son. The chapter is divided into three parts but before expanding on these and the thematic parallels between the artists we should note what could be described as an all-embracing *formal* parallel between Ibsen and Baker which applies to all of her works discussed here.

As a rule, Bobby Baker is the sole performer of her work and without exception her starting point is her 'own internal world, personality, opinions [and] concerns'<sup>559</sup>; however, her execution habitually displays elements of the conventional theatre vocabulary and evokes the ingredients of a well-rounded dramatic character. Perhaps the most conspicuous markers of this are her reliance on the linear structure of the narrative and her permanent on-stage costume, a white overall which, feminist theatre and performance theorists Geraldine Harris and Elaine Aston have pointed out, has in 'various shows [...] suggested the cookery demonstrator, the housewife, the (domestic) science lecturer, the patient and the psychotherapist.'<sup>560</sup> Another tangible theatrical trait in Baker's work is her method of delivery. British theatre scholar Lucy Baldwyn has described it as consisting of a 'gamut of emotions, reticence, irony and embarrassment'<sup>561</sup>. This profusion of tones commonly serves to confound audience expectations, particularly as it combines with the theme of feminism,

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<sup>559</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 26.

<sup>560</sup> Geraldine Harris, Elaine Aston, "Integrity: The Essential Ingredient" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 111.

<sup>561</sup> Lucy Baldwyn "Blending In: The Immaterial Art of Bobby Baker's Culinary Events," *The Drama Review* Vol. 40, Issue 4 (1996): 37.

but also elicits laughter, an important instrument in Baker's representations of home which often serves as the initial point of the audience's transportive journey.

The first part of the chapter introduces the problematic of home as a gendered space and traces the echoes of Ibsen's female characters Nora Helmer of *A Doll's House* and Gina Ekdal of *The Wild Duck* in Baker's portrayal of motherhood in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* which received a rare reprise at the Women of the World (WOW) festival at London's Southbank Centre in 2015. This occasion offered a timely reminder of the role of home in Baker's work and of her unique artistic sensibility in a culture that has been structured on the social, economic and political subordination of women.

A close analysis of housework as a performative expression of home and the transportive "moments" in the dramaturgical structure of *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* moves to a discussion on how the two Ibsen characters reflect the tenets of feminism. I argue that in her piece Baker rehearses some of the fundamental arguments (of some) of the earliest women's rights initiatives of the mid-nineteenth century, questions of gender inequality that are – remarkably (and regrettably) – as topical now as they were then. This exhibits Baker's thematic correlation with Ibsen's 'infamous portrayal of home,'<sup>562</sup> literature and culture scholar Anna Hunt has suggested, which 'is a model of the domestic that is reproduced and renovated'<sup>563</sup> throughout contemporary culture and whose renowned heroine Nora 'has become synonymous with feminist domestic discourse.'<sup>564</sup> Nora's abandoning of the family, underscored by her resolute closing of the front door, served as one of the defining acts for the first-wave of feminist activism calling for greater emancipation of women. The intellectually perceptive and politically deft poise which permeates Baker's *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* enables her to both identify with and question Nora's radical stance, making the artist's (feminist) politics difficult to pin down.

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<sup>562</sup> Anna Hunt, "Domestic Dystopias" in *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, eds., Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (London: Routledge, 2009), 123.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

Complicating this further is another significant trait of the performance piece: the sense of the tacit acceptance of the role of homemaker that has been culturally assigned to women and as such became the subject of disparagement from sections of twentieth-century, second-wave, feminists – the influential French philosopher and activist Simone de Beauvoir described it as ‘the torture of Sisyphus [locked in] endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day.’<sup>565</sup> As I discuss, Bobby Baker’s close examination of motherly and domestic duties in the piece stands, purportedly, in contradiction to the feminist association of housework with dreariness and indignity but exposure of the realities of women’s labour at home further strengthens Baker’s conceptual alignment with Ibsen. More specifically, it is an alignment with Gina Ekdal who represents the embodiment of the patriarchal construct of the “angel in the house,”<sup>566</sup> a devoted mother and wife whose ceaseless execution of housework brings her family the nurturing comfort of home. I offer a reading of Gina as a model of feminist theatre discourse that can be seen as equal to that of the comparatively more established Nora. My broader argument, however, is that the two characters serve as conceivable figurations of Bobby Baker’s feminist thought. They stand in diametrical opposition to each other and can be interpreted as the delineating points of the performance artist’s axis of inquiry into the culturally interrelated notions of woman (mother) and home. That is to say that Baker’s feminist representation of home is informed by the copiously documented historical battle for gender equality embodied by Nora but is also filled with the joy of creating the experience of home and the daily domestic rituals that engender the formation of a habitational sentence as evinced in the character of Gina.

Baker’s preoccupation with gender inequality continues in *Cook Dems* in which she mockingly adopts the role of an accomplished chef. Although the artist’s delivery persistently suggests the format of a parody, the issue of the gendering of the domestic tears

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<sup>565</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, transl. H. M. Paishley (New York: Random, 1952), 451.

<sup>566</sup> The term relates to the poem “The Angel in the House” by Victorian author Coventry Patmore – see Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1856) – which praises women who run the great majority of aspects of domestic life.

through the comedic veil of the piece and dispels the humorous tones. As I establish, by way of three distinct recipes Baker recasts food as a performative expression of home. She conceptualizes the domestic space as the site of imposed (masculinist) limitations and the concomitant feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt. The demonstration of culinary aptitude is thus subverted into a political demonstration of sorts – it represents an appeal for greater recognition of the significance and complexity of women’s domestic labour, reinforcing and deepening the arguments set forth in *Drawing on a Mother’s Experience* and highlighting the close association between home, food and nurturing.

I conclude the chapter with a closer look at Baker’s site-specific work *Kitchen Show* and, in particular, the conceptual choice to locate the piece in her own home. This decision can be considered as part of a rich but perhaps scholarly undervalued tradition of adopting the domestic space as a venue for a theatre event – a propensity which can be dated back to Roman times and, in various guises, resurfaces throughout modern history. As I point out, this strategy can also be seen as a kind of extension (but ultimately transcendence) of Ibsen’s ideas about the representation of home. In Baker’s rendition it provocatively sets up the question of the dividing lines between theatre and home which her audiences are forced to grapple with. *Kitchen Show* offers a unique convergence of theatre and home in which the domestic is not only the designated locus of the performance but also its central theme: it involves a distillation of the artist’s quotidian into a sequence of twelve ‘actions’<sup>567</sup> and a closing one that combines the full set into a single image, to create ‘a Baker’s dozen.’<sup>568</sup> The acts derive from disparate domestic moments and to each of them Baker attaches a story as a way of clarifying its inclusion. With the execution of these performative expressions of home, the artist conjures up a structure of dwelling that is both physical and social, comprising recognisable elements of material culture alongside a network of interpersonal relations through which spectators are invited to conduct imaginative flights to their own habitational sensibilities and conceptions of home.

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<sup>567</sup> Bobby Baker, “Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 164.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.



## Part I

### Drawing on a Mother's Experience: Housework as a Performativity of Home

In this section, I prepare the groundwork for the idea which I fully develop by the end of Part I, namely that *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* is to its time what Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is to its own a century earlier. Though Bobby Baker and Ibsen's enduring heroine Nora Helmer are separated by decades, the latter can in many ways be considered as the former's ideological precursor and, as I add, not only Nora but also Gina Ekdal constitutes an important aspect of feminist discourse in relation to Baker's performance piece. In *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, Baker brings under the magnifying glass her dedication to creating a sense of domestic habitation for her family. The immersion into acts of care and affection as well as more literal performative expressions of home such as cooking and cleaning invariably fill the artist with pride and satisfaction but also incite crippling fears, insecurity and anger. Charged with uncompromising emotional sincerity and painstaking matter-of-factness, Baker's rendering of her home life exposes the day-to-day struggles of scores of women in the Western world and beyond. The piece combines Baker's primary craft of image-making with the genre of performance art, to communicate her voyage into parenting. She describes it as one of complete transformation, 'isolating, bewildering, boring, frustrating and joyful at the same time.'<sup>569</sup> This divergent array of emotions emerges through the recollection of an assortment of events that accompanied the births of her two children. She elaborates on very intimate as well as often seemingly inconsequential everyday moments from which she extracts valuable insights that alter the ordinariness of the domestic into enlightening and heart-warming life lessons. Her memories are inextricably linked with food products or even specific dishes that were prepared and consumed at the time such as roast beef and tomato chutney. They hold a special significance as remnants of the past which continue to feed – metaphorically as well as on a literal level – the artist's present.

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<sup>569</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 48.

Baker's central intention in the piece is to complement the narrative with the creation of a visual artwork, a drawing. To achieve this, she calls on the very foodstuffs that play a part in her memories and employs them as pastels and brushes on her preferred working surface – a bed sheet splayed on the floor. Spontaneously distributing items like bread crumbs, milk and beaten egg whites across this makeshift canvas, Baker produces a chaotic, “abstract”, Pollockian work of art before lying down and folding herself into its concoction of colours, textures and scents. The entwinement of the narrated vignettes and the drawing process that jointly document the early years of Baker's motherhood culminates in a celebratory dance to Nina Simone's rendition of “My Baby Just Cares for Me” with the performer wrapped in the soiled sheet – her art – and promptly clearing up the mess accumulated through the endeavour.

Baker recounts a temporal sequence of events which, as she remarks at one point, might suggest an idealised portrait of family life: a young couple move into a new home with the help of friends on the day their daughter is born; settling into the role of parents – he goes to work, she takes up child-minding and household duties – they are ably supported by the wife's mother; before long they have a second child but retain close ties with their social circle, throwing dinner parties (after the children are off to bed!), ‘entertaining on a rather grand scale.’<sup>570</sup> Eschewing this inviting narrative arc, Baker intersperses the memories with wide-ranging advice in matters of housewifery and, significantly, startling revelations of the contradictory feelings of confusion and excitement that marked the initial stages of becoming a mother. She tells of her exhaustion and the anxiety of coping with the financial pressures of a single-income family; she opens up about being bedridden for an extended period of time due to illness and the spell of post-natal depression she suffered after the birth of her son.

The artist is equally effective in regaling her audience with self-ridicule and situational repartee, approaching delicate subjects with a degree of lightness. The laughter

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<sup>570</sup> Bobby Baker, “Transcript of Drawing on a Mother's Experience” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 153.

Baker provokes, however, frequently originates from a place of vulnerability and insecurity to which the incorporation of humour adds an unsettling quality as it displaces the narrative trajectory. In this way, the performance opens itself to multiple readings, enabling spectators to variously identify with, condemn or become complicit in the gender tensions and the related facets of domestic inhabitation. In other words, Baker facilitates the audience's drifting into their own intricate yet related mental constructs of home. This affective transferral proceeds along the interconnection of the figure of the mother and the notion of food and is expressed through the unceasing commitment to maternal nurture and the generational sharing of family tradition, the nuggets of domestic "wisdom" that travel from one (female) member of a family to another.

*Drawing on a Mother's Experience* enacts a kind of bridge between Baker's practice in the 1970s which revolved around the use food and cooking (and will be the focus of the next part of the chapter) and the new set of circumstances she encounters in returning to work as an artist who is now also a parent.<sup>571</sup> Building on this, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* reframes food as a medium of expression in the context of parenting which denotes an attempt to reconcile the seemingly conflicting identities of artist and mother. Baker establishes these in a manner that is reminiscent of the creation of a dramatic character in conventional theatre – there is Bobby the mother and housewife, the matter-of-fact, controlling dynamic and then there is Bobby the painter, captivated by the vibrant colours and the juxtapositions they form on the canvas, the exuberant, mischievous counterforce. Yet Baker is not interested in a kind of classical confrontation of these opposites. She instead blends them so as to bring out illuminating parallels and stark contradictions in a way that elicits an intimate as well as a political questioning of the meanings of home.

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<sup>571</sup> In particular, it connects the work with the maternal figure in *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home* (which I touch on more closely towards the end of the chapter) who was the only member of the "edible family" that was not made of cake but was instead a contraption of sorts serving as a hostess of the event and storing fresh sandwiches in its compartments and out which tea could also be poured.

The performer's diffident and nervy entrance in her trademark white overall and two shopping bags filled with, we later learn, various types of food and kitchenware evokes the cultural ambivalence historically associated with the role of the mother and housewife: the incontestable importance of nurturing children coupled with the lack of recognition that the work of caring for and managing a family's wellbeing receives. Baker's delivery initially establishes a sense of confidence fortified by the repetition of the piece's key terms – experience and mother – in the opening sequence but as the narrative progresses this is insistently undercut by assertions of embarrassment and self-deprecating remarks. Bobby *as mother* approaches the creation of the drawing with angst but nevertheless methodically and with precision. Arranging the working surface, Baker marks out her performance space by way of rapid movements and an air of haste. She carefully sets out the contents of the bags – her props – to have them to hand and lays a polythene cover on the floor to give it an additional layer of protection. As she applies the cotton sheet on top, she forewarns the audience that it will become soiled but reassures them that after it has been washed it will get reused (as will some of the other items). Her authority on matters of domestic upkeep is furthermore reinforced by the damp cloth she carries at all times so as to promptly deal with any emerging spillage and by the expeditious clearing away of the disposable goods and packaging.

The contrast to the housewife's conscientiousness and apologetic comportment is Bobby *as artist* whose mannerisms become manifest as the foodstuffs begin to populate the drawing. She displays the feeling of ease and exhibits delight at the evolving mixture as when 'the most amazing thing happens [after tinned fruit] juice combines with [sheep's] yogurt and you get this fabulous texture and colour. It is just kind of magical really!'<sup>572</sup> Similarly, beating eggs can offer 'the most mesmerising experience you can have [if you can appreciate how] egg yolks slowly change and slightly thicken. [...] You get these swirls and

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<sup>572</sup> *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, created by Bobby Baker (London: Artsadmin, Daily Life, 2007), DVD.

patterns that are, oh, just so wonderful!’<sup>573</sup> Such observations signify an attempt to recover – from under a mounting heap of maternal responsibilities and duties – the possibility of a different kind of self-expression. The desire to create is, nevertheless, mitigated by the fact that the (only) drawing materials available to her are assembled from her household. This inventively serves as an illustration of her feeling of entrapment, indicating that any escape from domestic commitments may only be momentary and will ultimately impose more housework (in the form of cleaning) – thus reaffirming de Beauvoir’s claim of its cyclical endlessness.

As Baker finds herself at a crossroads between the identities of the mother-housewife and the artist, she admits to the inability to cope which leads her into reminiscences of prolonged hospitalisation. To demonstrate this she lies down in the centre of the bed sheet and thereby temporally transposes the past into a performative present and a corporeal presence. That is to say, her memories of illness become vividly represented in real time, a momentary actuality on stage. Resting in the colourful melange produced by the variety of foodstuffs, Baker is not merely covered in the disparate fluids and savours of her props but also becomes figuratively saturated with the experience of motherhood that she has been recounting throughout the performance. At the same time as her clothing absorbs the materiality of the scattered edible items, her fragmented self soaks up the complex emotional significance of food as the principal entity of her family’s wellbeing of which she is the designated facilitator. With this ostensibly simple action Baker delivers a sweeping and multi-layered performative expression of home in which she integrates the socially unnoticed importance of motherly nurture and the domestic skill of cooking with the desire for professional (and personal) realization through art. And as she later folds her body into the drenched sheet and remains wrapped in it until she takes a bow, her enactment becomes a kind of celebration of the acceptance that these different parts of her are permanently conjoined, that for the sake of her family she is their indivisible sum.

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

Notwithstanding health scares and the sense of insecurity, the tenor of Baker's recollections remains one of perseverance, of battling through the difficult times. Arguably her darkest moments are related to a bout of depression, the onset of which she locates in the feelings of anger. Reiterating how she 'was really angry by this stage',<sup>574</sup> Baker offers no further elucidation as to the origin of the sentiment. She instead visually represents her frustration by pouring a tin of black treacle onto the canvas. With this striking image, she recalls a university tutor's recommendation to always add some black to her paintings, a comment she found bewildering at the time. On reassessment some years later, she concedes that '[n]ow, perhaps, I see the point'<sup>575</sup> and by way of only a smattering of words connects her past with her present, acknowledging through this covert release of suppressed emotions how profoundly motherhood has altered her perception or rather exposed her to a more variegated but also conflicting set of perspectives on life. Despite the challenging circumstances, Baker still finds occasion to rouse her spirit and re-awaken the artist within to admire how the 'treacle feathers into the Guinness and the tea'<sup>576</sup>, enriching the visual opulence of the drawing while we learn that, eventually, she managed to return to being 'a working mother, [going out] to earn money,'<sup>577</sup> thus claiming back the identity that she had vacated to devote herself entirely to maternal care.

For Baker the path to recovery is invariably formulated through the act of feeding as in the case of the nourishing fish pies which, Bobby tells us, her mother would bring in the weeks after the birth of her daughter and other meals she would prepare when Bobby felt 'confident enough [...] to drive'<sup>578</sup> and visit her. Baker's mother is afforded a prominent role in the narrative and her inclusion points to a broadening of the work's objective – the artist's intention to communicate her own parenting experience extends into the linking of women of three generations with the protagonist positioned at the centre of the triadic configuration.

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Bobby Baker, "Transcript of Drawing on a Mother's Experience" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 153.

<sup>576</sup> *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, created by Bobby Baker (London: Artsadmin, Daily Life, 2007), DVD.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Bobby Baker, "Transcript of Drawing on a Mother's Experience" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 151.

In utilising the cooking skills and domestic practices, that is, in *drawing on the experience* of her immediate predecessor, Baker is unwittingly placed into the (ceremonious) passing on of culinary knowledge of which the ultimate beneficiary will be her daughter, and the momentary recipient – in performance – is her audience. A mother's sharing establishes a sort of emotional heritage that runs through a family and whose primary agents are typically the women. The far-reaching affective hold that this process incites is detectable in Baker's heartfelt admission:

[w]hen I go to my mother's, I always eat everything up and then, when I've helped clear up, I always eat a little bit more in the kitchen. I don't know why, well actually, I do, I have a fairly good idea.<sup>579</sup>

Baker evokes the commonly unregistered emotional strings that tie us to the home and underscores once more that in her experience the domestic is the meeting point of the figure of the mother and the act of nurture. In this coming together exists a gendered structuring of the world observable particularly in the expectations imposed upon the role of the mother that are vastly disproportionate to those of the opposite sex. Feminist and cultural analyst Griselda Pollock writes that mother 'is not a person so much as a place, a supportive texture for other people's lives and personalities [...] a thereness which is the opposite of our idea of the individual, neither agent nor sensibility.'<sup>580</sup> Although Baker's memories are related to a specific time and place, the gentle weave of her account of motherhood holds a common human basis that is not spatially or temporally restricted. Building on a sense of fragility and interpersonal warmth, the affective fabric of maternal giving conveyed through the piece prompts figurative journeys towards the spectators' own affective understandings of the home.

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 151-2.

<sup>580</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Kitchen Show" in Bobby Baker, *Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 178.

Baker emphasizes the immediate value of her domestic pursuits: the care and nourishment of the family, and the formation of a sense of belonging. Through these “humble” daily activities – the performativities of home – she cajoles spectators to set off on transportive paths from the artist’s at-homeness to their own meanings of home. While the piece is embedded in the feminist discourse, Baker does not seem to be looking to endorse an agenda or declare allegiance to a particular line of feminism’s project. The artist’s political outlook is predominately expressed through cunningly veiled statements which transmit an engagement with the ideological concepts that hinder gender equality without explicitly signposting them. Her first-hand experience therefore involves a subtext of a deepened understanding of women’s decades-long struggle against systemic discrimination.

Reflecting on the motivation behind the work, Baker remarks that it ‘came out of such a passionate set of feelings, [...] the conviction that I had to try and communicate this with people was very strong.’<sup>581</sup> As she oscillates between the touching sincerity of an overwhelmed parent, the resourcefulness and pragmatism of a full-time housewife and the creative desire of the artist, Baker probes the commonly disregarded complexities of managing a home and offering a material and emotional shelter for its occupants. The performer’s experience is a candid laying out of the position of women at the end of the twentieth century. It constitutes a metonymy of the systematic undervaluing of mothers as exclusively nurturers of the family at the expense of a myriad additional personal aspirations they might harbour.

### **Bobby Meets Nora: Knocking on, Opening and Shutting the Door**

According to American theatre scholar Tracy C. Davis, since the emergence of *A Doll’s House* in 1879 ‘hundreds of women have been moved by Nora’s plight and inspired by her resolve [...] to seek a self-defined truth.’<sup>582</sup> The play represents ‘a historic turning

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<sup>581</sup> David Tushingham, “Drawing on a Mother’s Experience” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 155.

<sup>582</sup> Tracy C. Davis, “A Doll’s House and the Evolving Feminist Agenda” in *Feminist Research: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. Peta Tancred-Sheriff (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988), 218.



point in the expression of late nineteenth-century women's struggles,<sup>583</sup> in a time that witnessed a resilient proliferation as well as a unification of female voices demanding to be considered as equal contributors to the everyday public life. This gender disequilibrium forms the cultural backdrop to the play in which a young woman fulfils the male ideal of the obedient, accommodating house mistress in no apparent need of intellectual stimulation or indeed any form of agency that stretches beyond the boundaries of the family home. It is through her rejection of this oppressed position that Ibsen's Nora serves as the epitome of the feminist cause and in doing so instantiates a genealogy through which we are able to frame the women's experiences of home across forms of theatre and performance in the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. Bobby Baker is an important part of this thematic lineage and *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* offers a unique contribution to the continued posing of "the woman question".

Ibsen is known to have downplayed his role in helping to advance the feminist argument, most notably in response to a gathering organised to mark his seventieth birthday by the Norwegian Women's Rights League. As he put it: 'Whatever I have written has been without any conscious thought of making propaganda. I have been more poet and less social philosopher [and I] must disclaim the honour of having consciously worked for the women's rights movement.'<sup>584</sup> American theatre scholar Joan Templeton has argued that a host of (predominantly male) critics have blindly followed this statement which has led to a 'standard procedure in Ibsen criticism to save [him] from the contamination of feminism [by insisting on the] dismissal of women's oppression as the subject of *A Doll's House*.'<sup>585</sup> In her passionate and persuasive defence of the play as 'the greatest literary argument against the notion of two spheres, the neat, centuries-old division of the world into his and hers,'<sup>586</sup> Templeton rallies against what she considers inadequate, even sexist readings of the masterpiece. She also counters the dramatist's above words by evincing a very public

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>584</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Speeches and New Letters*, transl. Arne Kildal (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), 66.

<sup>585</sup> Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 110-111.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 137.

display of his liberal-mindedness – putting forward a proposal to recruit to the post of librarian at the Scandinavian Society in Rome a female candidate (a motion later opposed by his fellow members).

As a keen surveyor of the social and political currents, Ibsen understood the difficult position of women and would have surely been aware of the ambitions and efforts of the evolving women's rights movements. A close examination of *A Doll's House* reveals substantial correlation between the play and the prevalent feminist discourse of the time, suggesting cognate ideological perspectives alongside a similar figurality employed at the level of language. One of the central dramaturgical elements in *A Doll House's* is the juxtaposition of a woman's sheltered domestic habitation with the desire to abandon her husband and children and start a new, different life. This inner conflict is resolved through Nora's eventual exit, her shutting of the family residence front door which follows a personal realisation that radically alters the character's view of herself. Ibsen's strategic employment of the door, the emphatic underscoring of Nora's act of departure, reaffirms the significance of the problematics of the domestic space in the conception of female identity.

It calls to mind the words of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a leading nineteenth-century activist of the American feminist movement, who eagerly anticipated the reconciliation of the gender divide, positing that the 'same law of equality that revolutionized the state and the church is now knocking on the doors of our homes and sooner or later there too it must do its work.'<sup>587</sup> For both Stanton and Ibsen a home's front door represents the sort of consecrated point of entry and exit for the feminist argument as a means of social change. In this correspondence of ideology and linguistic imagery, Nora's final action can be interpreted as a response to the metaphorical knock envisioned by Stanton – it signifies the answering to the revolutionary call of the women's liberation cause which sees Nora cross the domestic threshold in the search for her own self. The front door of the Helmer abode becomes the boundary that separates the submissive doll from (the promise of) the

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<sup>587</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches*, ed. Ellen C. DuBois (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 133.

independent woman. Or as American anarchist and political activist Emma Goldman, whose work spans the late nineteenth and the first half of twentieth centuries, noted in awe of Ibsen's theatrical accomplishment – in yet another door-inspired observation – when Nora 'closes behind her the door of her doll's house, she opens wide the gate of life for woman.'<sup>588</sup>

In the developmental journey of Nora's character, Ibsen sets her psychological transformation against the masculine construction of femininity, that is, a sentimental model of restrictions of what a woman should represent. Toril Moi has examined this in relation to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's early nineteenth-century 'conservative theory of women's role in the family and marriage.'<sup>589</sup> She quotes the German philosopher as follows: 'Man [...] has his actual substantial life in the state, in learning, etc., and otherwise in work and struggle [...] Woman, however, has her substantial vocation in the family, and her ethical disposition consists in this piety.'<sup>590</sup> Ibsen plants the Hegelian ideological seed into the mouth of the righteous husband Torvald, bestowing thereby to the man the physical and intellectual superiority and the firm belief that he is the woman's designated protector which she reciprocates by being his pliant seductress:

Helmer: [W]hen I'm out with you among other people [...] do you know why I say so little to you, why I keep so aloof from you, and just throw you an occasional glance? Do you know why I do that? It's because I pretend to myself that you're my secret mistress, my clandestine little sweetheart, and that nobody knows there's anything at all between us. [...] And then when we're about to go, and I wrap the shawl round your lovely young shoulders, over this wonderful curve of your neck – then I pretend to myself that you are my young bride, that we've just come from the wedding, that I'm taking

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<sup>588</sup> Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of Modern Drama* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987), 12.

<sup>589</sup> Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 244.

<sup>590</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, transl. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 206.

you to my house for the first time – that, for the first time, I am alone with you – quite alone with you, as you stand there young and trembling and beautiful.<sup>591</sup>

A key element in this passage is Torvald's candid yet unusually self-assured admission of pretence, another feature of his phallocentrism. Although married to Nora (with children), he readily submits to delusions of deflowering her in secret, to which he appears to attach a sense of nobleness and seemingly has no reason to assume that his wife would not play along with his urge for make-believe. He takes these imaginary conceptions of dominance even further, wishing that 'some terrible danger might threaten you, so that I could offer my life and my blood, everything, for your sake.'<sup>592</sup> However, the exultingly proclaimed chivalry turns to derision as soon as the severity of Nora's past actions – the forgery of her father's signature – is revealed to him. In Torvald's eyes she at once becomes a vile creature, unworthy of his love and unfit to look after their children. That is to say, incapable of being a wife and mother.

Ibsen blends Torvald's virility with intellectual condescension towards his wife throughout the dialogue. When Nora voices agreement with a decision that Torvald has made – 'oh, you're always right, whatever you do'<sup>593</sup> – he approvingly comments that his 'little songbird's talking just like a real big human being.'<sup>594</sup> Similarly, Nora's use of the phrase 'scientific experiment'<sup>595</sup> in an exchange with Dr Rank draws her husband's remark: 'Scientific experiment! Those are big words for my little Nora to use!'<sup>596</sup> Torvald's arrogance brings to mind the observation of the founding force of British feminist thought, Mary Wollstonecraft, who reserves special scorn for men who 'have most earnestly laboured to domesticate women, have endeavoured by arguments dictated by a gross appetite, that

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<sup>591</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 87-88.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 89

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid.*

satiety had rendered fastidious, to weaken their bodies and cramp their minds.<sup>597</sup> In as much as Nora has been hailed as the beacon of the women's rights struggle, so Torvald can be considered as the prime illustration of the overbearing, immature – and unworldly – male, whose own sense of privilege is born of a constrained social, class and educational background which may be aligned with other naïve and sentimental patriarchal figures in Ibsen.

*A Doll's House* exhibits closest correlation with the feminist discourse of the nineteenth century in tackling the issue of women's access to education which, alongside the right to vote, represents the foremost demand of the first wave of feminism. As Joan Templeton has argued, '[b]uried in Nora are an intelligence, a courage, and a pride [...] that prove her brain is not an organ of her sex.'<sup>598</sup> Though savvy and resourceful, Nora lacks formal intellectual competencies which becomes particularly evident in her insufficient understanding of laws, as the treacherous clerk Krogstad makes only too clear to her. However, it is not until Torvald's fierce chastisement, his terror at being socially scarred 'for the weakness of a woman'<sup>599</sup> that she fully recognises her doll-like existence. Her sudden determination for learning outweighs the moral responsibility of staying at home as was the traditional (male) expectation attached to the role of wife and mother.

Nora: I must educate myself. And you can't help me with that. It's something I must do by myself. That's why I'm leaving you. [...] I must stand on my own feet if I am to find out the truth about myself and about life. So I can't go on living here with you any longer.<sup>600</sup>

Nora's desire to learn about the world – though not necessarily to acquire academic knowledge – is conceived as an act of empowerment, a journey of maturation which will

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<sup>597</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Ltd., 1970), 137.

<sup>598</sup> Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 139.

<sup>599</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays Two: A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen, 1980), 94.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

equip her to become a more fulfilled person – and thus a “better” mother and wife. Her utterances carry the force of Wollstonecraft’s call for resistance against the suppression and deliberate silencing enforced by the patriarchal rule in which she fully anticipates the destiny of Ibsen’s heroine:

Women have been allowed to remain in ignorance, and slavish dependence, many, very many years, and still we hear of nothing but their fondness of pleasure and sway, [...] their childish attachment to toys, and the vanity that makes them value accomplishments more than virtues. [...] But [...] till more equality be established in society, till ranks are confounded and women freed, we shall not see that dignified domestic happiness, the simple grandeur of which cannot be relished by ignorant or vitiated minds; nor will the important task of education ever be properly begun till the person of a woman is no longer preferred to her mind. For it would be as wise to expect corn from tares, or figs from thistles, as that a foolish ignorant woman should be a good mother.<sup>601</sup>

The author’s juxtaposition of toys and education reads as if Nora had been modelled on this very passage but perhaps even Wollstonecraft could not have imagined that a solution to women’s liberation could take the form of renouncing motherhood. Ibsen’s radical proposition continues to fuel interest in *A Doll’s House* and ensures its enduring relevance although it should be noted that the play’s dramatic strength equally derives from the precise, informed portrayal of the then (European) middle-classes and from how in tune the work is with the political discourse of the first-wave feminism. The intention of a faithful representation of reality as well as the examination of gender inequality are, as I have shown above, also particular qualities of Bobby Baker’s performativity of home in *Drawing on a*

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<sup>601</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Ltd., 1970), 385, 444.

*Mother's Experience* and a vital means of the spectatorial figurative return to the affect of home. And yet in this commonality there lurks a fundamental divide. If Nora closes the door on her predicament to make a point, Bobby does the opposite to achieve the same: Baker figuratively opens the door<sup>602</sup> on her domestic reality and lays bare her experience of the everyday as a mother torn between the responsibilities of nurture and the hopes of personal affirmation in ways other than parenting which, however, appear to elude her.

On the one hand, then, this illustrates how the historical circumstances of Baker's position are indebted to Nora's generation of feminist activism. As a second-wave feminist (the precepts of this wave of feminism will be expanded on in the following section), Bobby has been able to reap the benefit of access to higher education and exercise her right to a political voice. She has witnessed the spread of female emancipation in the twentieth century soften the kind of dogmatic rhetoric espoused by the likes of Hegel. The transformation, therefore, has been wide-ranging and palpable. On the other hand, for Bobby Baker the mother confined to the home, the patriarchal oppression has left a perpetual and profoundly scarring emotional imprint extending into an acute social condition. If *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* offers the opportunity for the revision of feminist thought since *A Doll's House*, the prevailing inference would be that the cultural change instigated by the latter has been significant and irrevocable but that the practices which sustain recalcitrant forms of gender discrimination continue to fester – more and more refined and indiscernible in action as well as in language – and are far from abolished.

At the end of the nineteenth century Nora leaves behind her husband's sentimental (masculinist) idealization of the woman as custodian of domesticity to establish her own sense of self. A hundred years later, the act of departure becomes elevated to a definition of female emancipation among second-wave activists who postulate the domestic, in the words of British sociologist Ann Oakley, as 'directly opposed to the possibility of human actualization.'<sup>603</sup> Although a contemporary to these perspectives and personally affected by

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<sup>602</sup> In *Kitchen Show* she does it literally – as we shall see.

<sup>603</sup> Ann Oakley, *Housewife* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 222.

the polemic in question, Bobby Baker does not appear to align her own gender anxieties to the radical solution and chooses instead to explore the commonly undervalued practice of housework by operating from within – she immerses herself in its idiosyncrasies only to arrive at unexpected discoveries, recognising the complexity and even the thrill it can instil. In what may be perceived as an ideological retreat, Baker sheds none of the astuteness of her argument. What is more, her examination of domestic chores evokes an(other) important Ibsenian precursor – Gina Ekdal of *The Wild Duck* – and casts a new perspective on the political significance of this character in the dramatist’s oeuvre.

### **Bobby Meets Gina: The Redemption of Performing Housework**

In the company of a notable – even notorious – female character like Nora the figure of Gina easily recedes into obscurity. A woman of few words, she offers little in the way of the growing assurance that accompanies the awakening selfhood of Torvald’s wife. However, while Nora remains a topical symbol of gender inequality in the twenty-first century, Ibsen’s dramaturgical inflection of Gina has resolutely stood the test of time in its own way. It is through congruity to Bobby Baker’s artistic examination of housework as the formative expression of domestic inhabitation that we can better appreciate how Gina’s feminist posture extends beyond the critical framework of the movement’s nineteenth-century tenets and forestalls the challenges of its second wave which considered women’s confinement to the home in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the main source of gender inequality.

One of the most outspoken critics of the patriarchal dictum was American activist and writer Betty Friedan. Her highly influential *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) presented a study of middle-class women in the US who, like herself, had followed ‘the voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication’<sup>604</sup> telling them that ‘truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that

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<sup>604</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1971), 15.



the old-fashioned feminists fought for.<sup>605</sup> So persuaded they settled for the life of a housewife but below the surface of a seemingly contented family existence, lurked the sense of profound personal un-fulfilment that would eat at them with ‘the silent question – “Is this all?”’<sup>606</sup> The anomie presented, Friedan argued, ‘the problem that has no name’<sup>607</sup>, rarely discussed among women for fear of embarrassment and ignored by their husbands and the society at large. For the author, the ultimate solution to greater female emancipation lay in the wholesale rejection of the idea of domesticity as an inherently feminine virtue and skill and, while her radical attitude gained considerable purchase, it also proved divisive as it posited feminism and homemaking as incompatible, oppositional entities, prompting extensive further debate within the second wave of the women’s rights movement.

In contrast to Nora, Gina does not possess the tools with which she could steer the resolution of the dramatic conflict in her favour and lacks the resolve to interrogate her confinement to the domestic sphere. She is the victim of patriarchal supremacy, first as a servant girl who succumbs to the advances of the predatory master Hakkon Werle, before becoming the collateral damage of his lustful transgressions, and later through marrying a self-deluding idealist Hjalmar Ekdal – ostensibly under coercion. Gina’s stage presence is, as a rule, defined by her conscientious performance of domestic chores: she spends her evenings sewing and dusting, oversees the family budget, does the shopping and the cooking along with the associated upkeep – all the while compensating for her husband’s seeming indifference to the family’s prosperity. Her industrious investment in the space of inhabitation supplies the emotional nourishment and serves as the coagulating factor of comfort in the Ekdal home.

Women’s sacrifice as a response to men’s sentimentalism and indolence is a central subject of the gender problematic in *The Wild Duck*. In fact, Gina’s entire activity in the play is implicitly sanctioned and regimented by the inability of men to act as responsible and autonomous individuals. This is particularly perceptible in Act Three in which, unbeknownst

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

to Gina, Hjalmar invites (male) guests to lunch, putting an added strain on their limited finances and forcing her to make do with the little food she has at her disposal. More people at the table means that while the ‘men sit down at the table and start eating and drinking, Gina and [her daughter] Hedvig come and go, waiting on them,’<sup>608</sup> prevented from enjoying sustenance themselves. A pragmatic housewife, Gina is very experienced in making a little money ‘go a remarkably long way,’<sup>609</sup> as Hjalmar puts it, which she attributes to the fact that ‘Hedvig and I need so little’<sup>610</sup> and later adding in response to her husband ‘I’ve always been a little more down-to-earth and practical than you.’<sup>611</sup>

Gina recognises that she cannot rely on Hjalmar to be the family’s breadwinner. Conscious of his irrecoverable idealism, she singlehandedly holds together the husband’s world through diligence and pragmatism, even taking photography sittings to spare him the work. She is, as social theorist Max Nordau has observed, the ‘female Sancho Panza,’<sup>612</sup> to whom the naive Hjalmar is the obvious Don Quixote. Effortlessly switching from one chore to another, without a sedentary pause in between, her application in the eyes of the patriarchal apparatus is unrecognized. However, had it not been for the combination of Gina’s perseverance, stoicism and common sense, Hjalmar and his ailing father would not have been able to lead relatively stable lives following the tribulations of the earlier years.

The play’s final sequence provides a brilliant illustration of the affective warmth of a caring home infused with motherly attentiveness. Hjalmar returns from a night of drinking to collect his belongings before he moves out – having learnt from his friend Gregers the day before that Hedvig may not be his but rather old Werle’s daughter. He is greeted by the sight of Gina ‘wearing an apron, [holding] a brush and duster’<sup>613</sup> who is going about her menial tasks as if entirely unaffected by the turmoil caused by Gregers’ disclosures. She quickly

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<sup>608</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, transl. Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 170.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-1.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>612</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 342.

<sup>613</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Plays One: Ghosts, The Wild Duck, The Master Builder*, Michael Meyer (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), 199.

detects her husband's apprehension, 'puts a tray with coffee, etc., on the table'<sup>614</sup> and says: 'I've brought you a cup of something warm, in case you feel inclined. And some bread and butter and a bit of cold fish.'<sup>615</sup> Gina does not plead with her husband to reconsider his departure but instead elicits a reaction by doing what she does best – serving him food and enhancing his domestic contentment. Little by little, bite by bite, Hjalmar's emotional frostiness thaws. Although he begins to accumulate some of his possessions, he quickly loses interest identifying 'hundreds of things I've got to lug away.'<sup>616</sup> Gina affectionately advises him to 'just take a shirt and a pair of knickers [and] come back for the rest later'<sup>617</sup> – her reference to the undergarments highlighting Hjalmar's utter ineptness to function independently and evoking a habitation intimacy of a married couple. By this point, the husband's determination has effectively evaporated: '[p]hew! It's so exhausting, all this packing!'<sup>618</sup>

Ibsen follows this remark with an imaginatively playful succession of affective expressions of home. Hjalmar 'tears off his overcoat and throws it on the sofa,'<sup>619</sup> in other words, he feels suitably warm in the comfortable shelter of the abode after a late winter's night binge and appears to suspend plans to leave the family. Gina, now convinced of his waning enthusiasm, retorts somewhat sardonically '[a]nd now your coffee's getting cold too'<sup>620</sup> – employing the quality diametrically contrasted to the warmth that has enveloped her husband and immediately provoking a response as he '[a]utomatically takes a mouthful; then another'<sup>621</sup> of the bread and the fish. When the butter runs out, Gina rushes to the kitchen to get some more, although he insists that he is happy to 'eat dry bread'<sup>622</sup> but Gina reminds him that 'this is meant to be fresh,'<sup>623</sup> gently asserting the commodifying cosiness which he

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

is able to enjoy in her care before pouring ‘him another cup of coffee [as] he sits on the sofa, spreads more butter on his bread, and eats and drinks for a few moments in silence.’<sup>624</sup>

The hint of reconciliation that lingers in this exchange between the spouses ends in the tragic death of their daughter – offstage – profoundly shattered by Hjalmar’s earlier rejection on account of Gregers’ indiscreet revelations. Hedvig, like her mother, becomes the victim of patriarchal recklessness and hypocrisy as Gina’s tireless labour to provide a home for her family in the face of adversity is obliterated in an instant. It is noteworthy that the ending to *The Wild Duck* has historically attracted much less attention than that of *A Doll’s House*. Ibsen faced stark public condemnation for making Nora leave her family and his heroine was variously labelled in derogatory terms.<sup>625</sup> In isolation, these remarks could easily be attributed to Hjalmar whose actions were far more destructive than Nora’s could ever have been.

While the figure of the domestic woman is a feature of early nineteenth-century melodrama, Gina’s preoccupation with chores is arguably the most comprehensive examination of housework in modern drama and theatre’s first. Although Bobby Baker’s performance practice is formally and conceptually removed from realistic theatre, it establishes a parallel with the theme of women’s labour at home which is an important conceit in *The Wild Duck*. The imbrication between the two does not operate solely on the thematic level but also concerns the historical development of feminist ideology through which Gina establishes a relevant model of feminist thinking, analogous to that of Nora. Of working-class origin, Gina could be said to represent a slice of the nineteenth-century female population that was conspicuously absent from the dominant discourse of the women’s liberation movement which was mainly made up of her privileged, predominantly upper middle-class counterparts. In her study of the representation of women in the British theatre between the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the First World War, scholar Leslie Hill points out the class gap, proposing that when nineteenth-century

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> See Joan Templeton, *Ibsen’s Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), particularly Chapter 5, “The Poetry of Feminism”.

feminist authors speak of the experiences of [...] women we can usually infer they are speaking of the white majority, but it does not always follow that they are thinking in terms of ethnicity; most often when they differentiate between individual women's experiences, they are thinking in terms of class. For the majority of upper- and middle-class social reformers, the working class *was* another race.<sup>626</sup>

Assertive, articulate and enjoying a degree of material comfort, these campaigners widely held the essentialist view of all women as equal, regardless of race, nationality, class or religion. At the same time, the households they came from typically employed domestic servants – like Gina – often providing poorly maintained lodgings and a meagre wage in exchange for strenuous and unregulated manual labour.<sup>627</sup> Thus, whilst recognizing the activists' championing of the women's cause through public engagement we should also note this did not consistently exclude their reliance on female domestic help in their own homes thereby in some sense perpetuating the culture of subordination.

The eventual decline of domestic service in the aftermath of the First World War – amid a transformed political landscape and a broader range of employment opportunities – was a significant influence on the formation of womanhood in the twentieth century and continues to inform its present-day principles. If domesticity of the bourgeoisie depended on the performance of housework by the lower stratum of society, the middle-classes of the interwar period and onwards increasingly found themselves charged with the necessity of maintaining their own homes. Unsurprisingly, this physical and psychological investment into the domestic space fell on the shoulders of women which in many ways returned the question of gender inequality back to its inception. The paradigm of separate spheres

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<sup>626</sup> Leslie Hill, *Sex, Suffrage and the Stage: First Wave Feminism in British Theatre* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), xxiv.

<sup>627</sup> See Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

resurfaced in a modified format – while women were now able to enjoy a greater degree of autonomy, they were yet again subjected to confinement in the home as housewives responsible for producing and sustaining a family life.

It is this protracted and gendered cultural process that lays the groundwork for Betty Friedan's feminist critique, the discourse of which extends into the period of Baker's artistic exploration of the domestic quotidian. Gina Ekdal, although rendered less visible in the eyes of the early efforts of the women's liberation movement, becomes the portent of the (unimagined) future. She circumvents the tenets of first-wave feminism – whose Ibsenite harbinger Nora Helmer was, incidentally, surrounded by servants – and in many ways anticipates the narrative of its twentieth-century iteration. In Bobby Baker Gina receives a most accomplished successor. Their worlds only seemingly differ: while Gina's is occupied and thus directly shaped by men, the absence of them in Bobby's is merely physical. The performance artist's confinement to the home and feelings of isolation are a product of refractory but, in the twentieth century (and twenty-first), more thinly veiled mechanisms of gender inequality. Though Bobby reflects on them she, like Gina, has to battle through adversity to find (at least some) fulfilment in the often small, simple gestures and mundane, mechanical chores which foster care, compassion and trust – a home.

## Part II

### **Cooks Dems: Food as a Performativity of Home**

Another significant piece in Baker's oeuvre that serves as a commentary on feminist issues is *Cook Dems*, originally conceived in three parts although Baker has often performed the discrete sections independently as a single show. What interests me in particular about this work is how the artist uses food as a performative expression of home. Early on in Baker's career, the employment of food signified, as she has noted, 'a turning point for me as an artist,'<sup>628</sup> initially through edible sculptures of everyday objects such as *Baseball Boot*

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<sup>628</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 29.

*Cake* (1972) ‘made out of Madeira cake [and] decorated with icing sugar,’<sup>629</sup> modelled in the shape of on an actual shoe, or the *Cake Christmas Dinner* (1973) in which cakes represented typical dishes of the festive season. As food enabled Baker to establish ‘my own language, material, form’<sup>630</sup>, her interest gradually expanded towards the process of food-making and consumption. In *Packed Lunch* (1979), Baker prepared a meal for the audience which consisted of ‘a hard-boiled egg [...] hand-made brown bread roll filled with Flora Margarine; a small bag of crudités; a small tub of aioli; a piece of fruit’<sup>631</sup> and while the patrons ingested the refreshments, the performer delivered a slide show lecture ‘on my skill, experience and consideration for their well-being in the preparation of these meals.’<sup>632</sup> Baker’s early culinary artworks offer an aesthetic as well as socially engaged exploration of food, ranging from commonplace daily meals to indulgent treats and often evoke a playful, even exuberant domesticity.

As Kathy Battista writes, domestic themes formed a prominent subject of feminist-inspired performance art in 1970s Britain – a budding genre that aimed to establish ‘feminism alongside other major currents of contemporary art at the time.’<sup>633</sup> Cultural scholar Michèle Barrett attributes the formation of Baker’s feminist position to the male-dominated setting where she earned her painting degree and which was pervaded by influences of abstract sculpture – the ‘massive art forms [...] typically masculine in their size and pretension.’<sup>634</sup> Feeling that she could not fit in at university, Baker found recourse in ‘endlessly re-reading the works of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf’<sup>635</sup> whose *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) she would return to ‘approximately once a month.’<sup>636</sup> In this prominent essay, which serves, as literary scholar Naomi Black has noted as ‘an explicit statement of

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<sup>629</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

<sup>633</sup> Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2013), 3.

<sup>634</sup> Michèle Barrett, “The Armature of Reason” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

[Woolf's] feminist views<sup>637</sup>, the author examines the contentious history of women's exclusion from education and public affairs and focusses on how this process has impoverished their contribution to the realm of literature. Recalling a visit to an elite educational establishment (she refers to it as "Oxbridge") during which she consumes a rather noteworthy meal, Woolf links the scarcity and distinctiveness of female literary voices to the subject of food in a way that displays an uncanny correspondence to Bobby Baker's early artistic endeavours. Though lengthy, it will be helpful to quote the passage in full:

It is a curious fact that novelists have a way of making us believe that luncheon parties are invariably memorable for something very witty that was said, or for something very wise that was done. But they seldom spare a word for what was eaten. It is part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings, as if soup and salmon and ducklings were of no importance whatsoever [...]. Here, however, I shall take the liberty to defy that convention and tell you that the lunch on this occasion began with soles, sunk in a deep dish, over the whitest cream, save that it was branded here and there with brown spots like the spots on the flanks of a doe. After that came partridges [...] with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet [...], their potatoes, thin as coins but not so hard; their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent. And no sooner had the roast and its retinue been done with than [it was] set before us, wreathed in napkins, a confection which rose all sugar from the waves. To call it pudding and so relate it to rice and tapioca would be an insult.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>637</sup> Naomi Black, *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 112.

<sup>638</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1984), 9-10.



Woolf contends that the particular value of feminine sensibility lies in the capacity to capture what is foreign to the male experience and that this affective perspective is of worth and is adequately equipped to forge its own artistic expression. Her resolve to act against the norm represents a claiming of autonomy that had been seized from women by centuries of the oppressive patriarchal rule. The connection that Woolf makes between the entrenched masculine culture of domination and female proclivity for matters of food preparation (though the latter is arguably a relic of the historical gender discrimination) brings to mind Baker's innovative employment of food as the integral element of her creative vocabulary but it also relates to her sense of inferiority as a woman and her detachment from the formal structures of the academic environment at the outset of her career. As the artist has noted, 'I quite consciously felt excluded, [...] a white middle-class girl who came from the suburbs of London and they didn't take me seriously and weren't interested.'<sup>639</sup> In subsequent years, Baker similarly found the capital's gallery circuit an enclosed, select milieu which did not encourage art that would communicate with the wider public. Like some of her fellow artists, she observed the lack of opportunities for women to present work in mainstream art venues and this only deepened the impression of the pervasiveness of institutional sexism she had encountered as a student.

The premise of *Cooks Dems* involves the setting up of 'a kitchen from scratch'<sup>640</sup> including worktops, utensils and electrical equipment which assist the artist in sharing a range of cooking tips that may be deemed, as she ironically puts it, 'useful in day to day life.'<sup>641</sup> The three segments are identical in structure: Baker starts off with a demonstration that methodically introduces the ingredients and explains the required steps of the preparation process, imparting her extensive knowledge along the way and commonly resorting to acerbic, self-deprecating humour. She follows this with 'some serving

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<sup>639</sup> Michèle Barrett, "The Armature of Reason" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.

<sup>640</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 51.

<sup>641</sup> *Cooks Dems*, created by Bobby Baker (London: Artsadmin; Daily Life, 2007), DVD.

suggestions'<sup>642</sup> – a sort of contrapuntal retort, the transposition of the recipes into an entirely unsuspected performative context.

In *Sauci* Baker explains how to make three dessert sauces: chocolate, custard and raspberry. She brings out an athletic male dressed only in swimming trunks and, continuing in the demonstrator mode, proceeds to apply the sauces onto his figure. Seemingly oblivious to the various connotations of this undertaking, Baker focuses on the rich texture of the sauces and the juxtaposition of the different colour tones as they exhibit themselves on the man's body. Through comedic exaggeration of the act of painting and in admiration of her own skill, Baker establishes her model as a canvas and concludes the playful session by pressing tightly against his body so that her pristinely white overall is left with an imprint of her artwork which she calls 'a monoprint.'<sup>643</sup>

The second segment, titled *Patiss*, deals with the preparation of choux pastry. She prepares the mixture and pipes it out onto a tray in the shape of a baby to the accompaniment of a variety of "the chef's" explanatory comments and finally places it into the cooker to bake. When done, Baker positions the pastry on a kitchen trolley and fills it with cream and chocolate, outlining bodily features, including a nappy. To mark the transition from the act of cooking, Baker removes her white overall revealing a lacy garment underneath. She then replaces her clogs with a pair of high heels and proceeds to push the trolley across the stage, effectively mimicking a mother with a pram. As she reaches centre stage and makes a few steps towards the audience, the artist takes the (pastry) baby into her arms, lovingly cuddles it until suddenly biting off its head and then voraciously eating the rest of it.

*Dou* is based around the preparation of bread dough. The artist demonstrates parts of the process but in the interest of brevity performs the rest of the segment with pre-baked samples. Her creative employment of the dough is aimed at addressing the feeling of when 'your self-esteem is very low,'<sup>644</sup> which can be tackled, she contends, by moulding the dough into the forms of deer horns, a shield and a garment respectively. As the performer

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

clarifies, baking these items and adorning them with pieces of string allows one to attach them to one's body, thereby enjoying a number of benefits: antlers placed on the head ensure a greater sense of importance, the shield (which she calls the 'breast pizza'<sup>645</sup>) tied around the torso offers protection and the skirt consisting of 'bread balls'<sup>646</sup> strung together makes you feel more glamorous. Proudly parading the artefacts as part of her attire, Baker concludes the piece – she dismantles the hastily assembled, makeshift kitchen with deliberately overstated physical gestures to a musical score and cyclically takes us back to the beginning, an empty (stage) space.

The theme of cookery demonstrations can be traced to Baker's early work such as the *Dinner Party* (1976) or the aforementioned *Packed Lunch* (1979), both of which revolved around the artist's skill in food preparation. Created over a decade later, *Cook Dems* carries the imprint of Baker's experiential journey into maternity, the raw and deeply moving contours of which she presented in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*. Here, however, Baker consciously avoids the exposures of her intimate world and instead sharpens the humour to an absurdist dimension to offer another powerful critique of the ideological constructs that have shaped gender inequality. The individual segments represent three separate but interrelated aspects of women's subordinate position in society. In *Sauci*, Baker conceives the ingenuity and playfulness of a housewife stifled by the confinement to the domestic environment who deliberately misemploys traditional dessert sauces by splattering them on a young male. This act signifies a variation of the soiling of her own body in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* as her attempt at recovering the inhibited artist within is duly replaced by intentional smearing of a masculine figure as a representative of the oppressive hegemony of the dominant gender. He remains motionless and silent for the duration of Baker's relentless yet entertaining execution in which she is led by her imagination, invigorated by and fully immersed in the artwork.

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<sup>645</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 51.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

The artist contrives a situation in which the gender imbalance is reversed – the woman is in control and asserts her will onto the accommodating, pliant member of the opposite sex. Baker preserves the competence of a resourceful housewife, by now an established feature in her theatrically-devised character, but veers off into the hitherto unexploited territory of sexual innuendo which she formulates as a tension between being deliberately flirtatious and seemingly unaware of the behaviour she is exhibiting – or as Clare Johnson has aptly remarked, being ‘deliciously inappropriate.’<sup>647</sup> She continually dips her fingers in the pots, savouring the taste while licking her lips but at the same time fails to acknowledge the imposing physicality of her “model-canvas” although, in a titillating manner, her deft, staccato movements relish the opportunity to splatter the sauces on the private regions of his body – to the audience’s amusement.

The central theme of *Pattis* is motherhood. By shaping pastry in the form of a baby, Baker uses the interplay of the literal and the symbolic to set up the crescendo of the grotesque cannibalistic twist, producing yet another potent feminism-inspired image. Her feasting simultaneously operates as an innocuous consumption of a food item and a deplorable, Medea-like act of savagery, a contradiction the artist previously explored in the installation *Baby Cake* (1973) in which she carved up the edible artwork for people to indulge in only to find that most were put off – ‘shocked [...] at the sight of me chopping up the baby.’<sup>648</sup> Baker is wonderfully adept at bringing together such conflicting meanings without forcing her own beliefs on the audiences’ judgement. Her statement is directed towards the prevalent, culturally-ingrained assumption that the work of caring for children is inherently and exclusively a feminine disposition, a sort of requirement of womanhood. Her conveying of the message, however, avoids an explicitly political rhetoric in favour of merely laying out the polemic to allow the spectators to draw their own conclusions.

To further reinforce her argument through visual means, Baker replaces the usual housewife attire with a fancy dress. This transformation evokes a confident kind of

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<sup>647</sup> Clare Johnson, *Femininity, Time and Feminist Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 105.

<sup>648</sup> Bobby Baker, “A Historical Artist” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 51.

femininity, an outgoing personality that stands in contrast to the withdrawn parent in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* or the mischievous yet (conceivably) sheltered homemaker we encounter in *Sauci*. The breaking of the domestic boundary signifies an ideological turn through which the artist's conception of the woman no longer seeks a grounding within the spatial determination of the domestic space. This shift also marks the structural framework of *Dou* where Baker appears to delve deepest into the feminine experience. She introduces the display of her cooking skill in the context of a woman's damaged self-image, ascribing to her imaginative culinary designs the ability to confront the gender-fraught challenges of everyday life. Cookery and art thus combine once more to foster a form of resilience against a woman's diminishing sense of self-worth, woven into the social fabric of the culture by a long history of subjugation.

The artist resorts to traditionally masculine tools and recasts them, albeit humorously, as devices of female empowerment. The employment of antlers indicates the men's biological dominance over women – an important part of deer anatomy, antlers represent, according to American zoologist Richard J. Gross, 'status symbols in the competition for male supremacy'<sup>649</sup> and their size and structure are 'dependent on the rise and fall of testosterone secretion.'<sup>650</sup> These branched horns serve, therefore, as a manifestation of strength and fertility, primarily to rival other male deer for access to a female mate. Donned on a woman's head the antlers suggest an intentionally farcical inversion of the biological laws and accentuate some of the decidedly more primal characteristics of masculinity while wittily espousing the usurping of its superiority.

The second of Baker's contraptions is shaped like a pizza and resembles a shield. An essential piece of armour of the medieval times, it represents another culturally recognisable symbol of the masculine, the bestowal of which – in many communities – was a way of initiating boys into manhood. Attaching the baked specimen to her torso, the artist produces another set of gender interpretations which, in Baker's signature move, are simultaneously

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<sup>649</sup> Richard J. Goss, *Deer Antlers: Regeneration, Function and Evolution* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

endearing and confrontational but above all humorous: she likens the tension between the sexes to a state of war and indicates that she is prepared to defend the institution of “woman” by means of a traditional male device. To add a further feminine imprint, Baker decorates the protective device with her very own heraldic motif and, topping off the irony, counterbalances these highly virile implements with a distinctive touch of elegance in the form of a skirt made of dough balls – thus her fanciful makeover is complete.

A man splattered with fragrant dessert sauces, a devoured baby-shaped pastry filled with chocolate and cream, and clothing accessories made of bread belong to Baker’s extraordinary collection of delectable artworks in the service of a unique and multi-layered critique of the historical subordinate relationship of men towards women. Fortified by a range of encyclopaedic references, these artefacts attest to the performer’s comprehensive understanding of not merely the paradigms of the women’s right movements but the broader landscape of social discourses out of which feminist thought emerged and continues to be informed by. Baker’s recipes turn out to be more than demonstrations of her culinary prowess. They exhibit an intelligence of a perceptive thinker and a profound emotion of an inspired artist. These subtle and, at the same time, whimsical creations are touching demonstrations of skill, painterly études and neatly disguised incidences of another kind of demonstration – the political one. The mastery of Baker’s protesting voice is that she transmits her stance by acting in the reverse, that is, by being apolitical. Or as British literary scholar Marina Warner remarks, Baker ‘does not come on as a victim asking for solidarity, [...] no grievances are being aired, no self-pity.’<sup>651</sup> Instead she cajoles us into the undulations of her domestic inhabitance, the ebbs and flows of selfless caring for one’s loved ones and the unsuspected thrills and discoveries of housework while holding on to her motherly wisdom and artistic inspiration – a woman caught in the pressures created by a man’s world.

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<sup>651</sup> Marina Warner, “Bobby Baker: The Rebel at the Heart of the Joker” in Bobby Baker, *Redeeming Features of Daily Life* eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 104.

### Part III

#### Kitchen Show: Where Does Home End and Theatre Begin?

Bobby Baker's examination of domesticity from *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* through to *Cook Dems* and finally to *Kitchen Show* – the piece which will be the main subject of the pages that follow – indicates a progressively experimental approach to performance space. It begins in the conventional black box theatre in which the artist calls her habitation into existence for the audience through vivid personal memories of motherhood and a handful of props, creating a stirring portrayal of her domestic life in, essentially, an empty space. In *Cook Dems* this is followed, in a more tangible way, by Baker setting up an impromptu kitchen on stage, modestly but nevertheless sufficiently equipped to allow her to exhibit her knowledge of food preparation. In *Kitchen Show*, Baker's stage becomes her very own abode. Considering the artist's thematic range, the creation of a performance piece at home can be said to represent a natural progression in her extensive experimental body of work. It recalls a week-long installation *Edible Family in a Mobile Home* (1976) in which she used a prefabricated housing unit as the setting for an installation depicting family life. As part of the concept, the walls and floors of the abode were covered in newspapers and then glazed with icing. Members of the household – parents and three children – were human-size figures made from different cakes and allocated a room each. The exception to this was the mother who was a mobile element of the set, 'made of a teapot head, a dressmaker's dummy torso and a stool on wheels dressed with a tablecloth skirt.'<sup>652</sup> As they entered the home, the audiences were offered a warm drink, invited to roam through the space and encouraged to eat the skilfully crafted cakes. The sugar-coated house with its "sweet" residents deteriorating as the week went on provided an ironic commentary on the image of the idyllic family while the visual separation of the mother from the rest of the family anticipated the artist's own experience of parenthood which was to mark her later creations. Baker adopts some of the strategies from this early

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<sup>652</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 37.

work in *Kitchen Show* as well as borrows elements from other pieces to delineate a new conceptual dimension of her transporative dramaturgy.

Performing to audiences in her home, Baker becomes part of an exceedingly rich but arguably scholarly under-examined tradition of theatre in the domestic space which spans centuries and traverses not only cultural periods and aesthetics but also national borders and political systems, ostensibly establishing a formal entity of its own. I provide a brief overview of this tradition in the following paragraphs. For the affluent citizens of ancient Rome, employing actors provided highly sought entertainment at more or less intimate gatherings in their lavish residences. According to the classical theatre scholar Eric Csapo, domestic theatrical occasions were known as far back as the sixth century B.C. and well into the first century. They varied in structure but were largely recitations as ‘drama in these elite literary coteries was normally read and not performed [and rather than theatrical], textual qualities [were praised such as] linguistic style and good plots.’<sup>653</sup> Such theatrical activity at home was a mark of prestige and sometimes even a social tool as actors (who were mostly slaves) would often be trained to declaim speeches that sang praises to their politically-ambitious masters so as to further their cause.

The re-emergence of interest in classical drama in the Renaissance period saw a significant spatial shift in the conception of theatre art. Street markets and town squares – the dominant sites for the more secular theatrical activity in the medieval period – were gradually replaced by the outer enclosures of the majestic homes of the nobility. In the ducal courts of Italy, as Marvin Carlson writes, ‘performances took place in the courtyards of palaces – a smaller, less openly accessible space than that of piazzas [and although there were] a variety of social classes represented’<sup>654</sup> not everyone could fit into the space. Renaissance drama in courts was soon followed by another re-location – this time to the great hall meaning that ‘the performance space and audience space were now completely

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<sup>653</sup> Eric Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 187.

<sup>654</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 39.



absorbed into the body of the palace<sup>655</sup> and thus only available to invited guests, a move that indicates the ‘idea of theatre as an art restricted to learned society’<sup>656</sup> which, it can be argued, remains alive today.

In the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries the trend of court theatres spread across Europe and by then purposely built venues were being erected within royal palaces. The adoption (and possibly – when required – transformation) of the Renaissance great hall for performance was thus amply superseded by small-scale replicas of classical theatre architectures. Such amusement was, however, not only limited to royalty but also attracted, according to Marvin Carlson, the ‘wealthy aristocrats and even well-to-do merchants [who] were including completely equipped theatres [...] in their homes’.<sup>657</sup> In later decades, private theatregoing flourished particularly in pre-revolutionary France where it remained highly exclusive and was, as American historian Sarah Maza has noted in her study of the period, ‘mostly produced and consumed by the social elites [yet] not aimed at delivering a social or moral message but at providing light and pleasant entertainment’.<sup>658</sup> Such occasions would lure established literary figures – for instance, Voltaire who would even write and perform in them – and involved, as was the case in the preceding centuries, a mixture of professional, or rather more dedicated, makers of the theatre and keen dilettantes.

An especially prolific form of amateur dramatics at home was the drawing-room theatricals of late-eighteenth century English middle-classes, the popularity of which spread into the Victorian age. This is well captured in Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* (1814) which features a group of young people who, amid romantic intrigue, escape boredom at a large country estate by putting on self-authored theatre pieces. Much like their French predecessors, the Victorians wanted theatre to provide enjoyment rather than contemplation. British popular historian Sara Hudson claims that although some types of their private

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>658</sup> Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres in Pre-revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 78-79.

theatricals could be ‘shamelessly titillating,’<sup>659</sup> they mainly consisted of ‘good, clean English fun, [...] over-the-top silliness [and] facetious playfulness.’<sup>660</sup>

The recurring theme in these instances of theatre within a home is the conscious seclusion of a typically prosperous minority in order to consume – and in some cases even create their own – predominantly light theatrical entertainment. This social division remains part of the cultural code of theatregoing well into contemporary times and, at least in Europe, extends to the institutional theatre system often supported by the governmental apparatus of the state of which the privileged strata of society have historically been the principal patrons. From after the Second World War, however, the intertwinement of theatre and the home can be examined through a prism of another kind of paradigm – the postmodern turn to essentially non-theatrical spaces contributing to a burgeoning field of alternative, site-specific theatre and performance art predicated on abolishing conventional (dramatic) approaches to theatre. From the perspective of the spatial politics of such artistic practice, Bobby Baker’s *Kitchen Show* as well as *Edible Family in a Mobile Home* clearly belong to this tradition which can also be said to include, for example, the dissident theatre of the Cold War period in the Soviet Union. Taking place secretly in flats and houses of its supporters, this activity was forced into hiding from the authorities in order (for the actors, the audiences as well as the art form) to survive. Home in these performances clearly takes on multiple performative expressions – while the domestic serves as a kind of redemptive venue, the nation-state (of which the domestic space accommodating the act of theatre is part) functions as the agent of repression.

The main motivations for such employment of the material home are ideological retaliation (as a way of sustaining a community of like-minded people) and fear of political persecution. For Baker it is an autonomous artistic choice although in the case of *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home* it is at least to some extent also a practical solution to compensate for lack of production funding. The divergent genre of theatre at home postulates an intrinsic

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<sup>659</sup> Sara Hudson, *Victorian Theatricals: From Menageries to Melodrama* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2000), 23.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

connection between the act of performing and the affective meaning of one's dwelling. The trait that distinguishes *Kitchen Show* as a "home-specific" theatre occasion is that it explores precisely the territory it inhabits as it involves the performance of everyday habitational moments that are associated with the space of the kitchen but also other areas of the home. That is to say, the domestic is both the site and the subject of the work. In other words, form and content become one and the same which leads to the obfuscation of representational boundaries and raises a quandary: are we watching a show or are we visiting a household? Where does home end and theatre begin?

These questions also interested Henrik Ibsen. Writing about *Ghosts* in a letter to a literary peer, he proposes that the 'effect of the play depends a great deal on making the spectator feel as if they were actually at home, sitting, listening and looking at events happening in real life.'<sup>661</sup> The marker of separation between his realistic theatre and reality is the "as if" which denotes the suspension of disbelief or the existence of the imaginary fourth wall between the stage and the auditorium. As we saw in Chapter 1, this precept of realist (and naturalist) theatre attracted criticism from figures like Bertolt Brecht. Hungarian-born theatre critic and translator Martin Esslin notes that Brecht's work, alongside that of the 'Absurdist, [...] fulfilled the aims which the Dadaists and the Surrealists had vainly struggled to attain [which was] the revolt against naturalism [that] amount[ed] to a resolute rejection of stage illusion.'<sup>662</sup> The avant-garde's negative stance towards illusionistic staging served as a prominent postulate in the development of postmodern artistic practices of the late twentieth century. It also reverberated in the postmodernist notions of performance space and site-specific work such as Bobby Baker's *Kitchen Show* which can be seen as the product of this process of evolution. However, the century and more that separates Baker and Ibsen through a comprehensive reconceptualization of realism's "as if" also connects them through their interest in the patterns of everyday domestic inhabitation.

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<sup>661</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *Letters and Speeches*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn (Clinton, Mass: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), 222.

<sup>662</sup> Martin Esslin, "Modernist Drama: Wedekind to Brecht" in *Modernism 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 559.

**‘It’s Moments like This That Make It All Worthwhile’<sup>663</sup>**

As in the preceding two works, the primary vehicles of the transportive experience – the dominant performativities of home – in *Kitchen Show* are the practice of housework and the entity of food. In this section I show how Baker explores the domestic space on the literal level of concrete physical actions and through the execution of house chores, including cooking, draws attention to the set of skills they involve to reveal the functional, aesthetic and above all emotional value they hold in everyday life. Upon attending the inaugural performance of *Kitchen Show* at Baker’s home in North London, American scholar Lesley Ferris described it as ‘the quintessential liminal theatre moment’<sup>664</sup>. It signified the point of admission into the emotional and material contours of family life, building on a sense of intimacy as well as an immediacy between the simultaneous experiences of a home and a performance. The piece was at least in part framed as a conventional theatrical event with rows of benches arranged around ‘the area where cooking takes place’<sup>665</sup> and where the performance unfolded. The opening “scene” underscored the dual nature of the encounter. The audience were offered a hot drink – a somewhat traditional gesture of hospitality to which the sensation of warmth, no doubt, afforded a heightened sense of domesticity and comfort, a ploy Baker had previously utilized in *Edible Family in a Mobile Home* although within the broader theme of food preparation and consumption that defined much of her work in the 1970s.

Here, however, the artist limits herself to the role of a host rather than (also) a cook and, as she serves everyone’s tea and coffee, she conveys her eagerness for welcoming guests in this way, pointing out that ‘I always do the milking and sugaring myself.’<sup>666</sup> She also complains about the unspoken awkwardness of her visitors’ hesitation on taking up her offer and indecision in communicating the choice of drink which disrupts the dynamics of

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<sup>663</sup> Bobby Baker, “Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 168.

<sup>664</sup> Lesley Ferris “Daily Life 1: Kitchen Show” in Bobby Baker, *Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 172.

<sup>665</sup> Bobby Baker, “A Historical Artist” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 53.

<sup>666</sup> Bobby Baker, “Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 164.

entertaining. Baker deconstructs a seemingly ordinary exchange between people while in the process of facilitating it. She playfully interrogates what makes up such an everyday domestic moment and shades it with unexpected nuance as her probing of the undercurrents of human interaction sets the affective tone for the occasion.

Distributing light refreshments is the first in the sequence of *Kitchen Show*'s twelve performativities of home extracted from Bobby Baker's daily life and executed in front of the audience alongside a corresponding blend of narrated memories, observations and useful housewife teachings. Through characteristically engaging and witty commentaries on domesticity, Baker carries out a range of recognisable kitchen routines such as peeling carrots or tidying drawers. Each of the chores culminates in what she calls an 'action'<sup>667</sup> and a 'mark'<sup>668</sup> as a way of summing up the evocative domestic episodes in a declarative and memorable way. Thus her rumination on receiving guests concludes with the action of 'stirring milk or sugar into a hot drink'<sup>669</sup> and making a mark on her body (to reinforce the action) by bandaging her fingers with sticking plaster so as to signify the position of holding a tea spoon. Formulating the key structural convention of the piece, the actions and marks represent two concurrent narratives with respective dramaturgical trajectories. The former involves a kind of doing which follows on immediately from the particular performative expression of home being examined while the latter consists of an intervention to the artist's body, resulting in a static but enduring symbolic record of her domestic demeanour. As Baker moves through the piece these figurative indications of her being-at-home accumulate to form the final image of a woman covered with the marks of her housewife endeavour which, as we shall see, is reminiscent of the besmirched female figure of *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*.

Baker conceives of the kitchen as the central unit of domestic habitation, the space to nurture loved ones, celebrate friendships, overcome irritations and indulge in momentary

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<sup>667</sup> Bobby Baker, "A Historical Artist" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 54.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> Bobby Baker, "Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public" in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 164.

frivolities. Granting access to her private world, she enables the audience to share in her intimacy, her candid self-disclosures. These exposures of personal views and emotions firmly root her in the architecture and the distinctive disposition of her home. Surrounded by elements of domestic material culture, Baker performs a diet of daily activities that, predictably, starts with cooking; however, this time not in the context of preparing a meal. Rather, she introduces it as a meditative process through which she fondly recalls a friend and the sharing of cookery advice, a form of mutual appreciation and generosity. She completes this action by ‘resting a wooden spoon on top of a saucepan’<sup>670</sup> – like her friend would – and marks it by fixing the spoon in her hair as an accessory.

The counterpoint to this display of domesticity is the action of hurling a pear into a cupboard to offload anger. Faithful to her performance tactics, Baker avoids revealing the reasons for her frustration and prefers to focus on the technique of her throw which she accompanies by a scream humorously evoking a cricketer. As much as the physical release, she is concerned about the possible damage that her toss might cause but housewife experience has taught her that using ‘a cupboard door to throw against [is good] because it’s painted with vinyl silk and the pear washes off more easily than from a vinyl matt wall.’<sup>671</sup> As a mark for this action, Baker puts a pear into the pocket of her overall so as to have it to hand but what stands out in this domestic moment is the artist’s commitment to the somewhat farcical attempt at relieving oneself of tension which seamlessly morphs into a sort of tutorial on how to deal with kitchen stains. This juxtaposition of chaos and care accentuates the performer’s belonging to the space, making the image alive with meaning for her audience and resonant with their own experiences of home.

A particular source of domestic excitement for the artist is opening a new tub of margarine, the wavy surface of which allows her to examine its voluptuousness and inspires her to ‘fix that moment of beauty in my memory.’<sup>672</sup> In what suggests itself to be a pleasurable diversion from the currents of the everyday, Baker makes an astonishing leap

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid., 168.

pronouncing that ‘it’s moments like this that make it all worthwhile’<sup>673</sup> thus positing the home as the playground of secret delights and innocent daydreams, stirring spectatorial sensitivities in the direction of cognate private idiosyncrasies to which the household offers a kind of sanctuary. A similarly satisfying facet of Baker’s inhabitation is listening to music while she goes about her cooking. It often ‘makes me want to dance [to the point where] I get carried away and sprinkle spinach leaves or other foodstuffs around me,’<sup>674</sup> comprising a further instance of habitational contentedness which emotionally anchors the performer to her home.

While clearly the site of a great amount of work, the domestic is also a place of rest. When ‘overcome with weariness,’<sup>675</sup> typically after lunch, Bobby allows herself to lie down and take a nap. A luxury craved by many (who, like the artist, juggle busy timetables and numerous commitments) but rarely seized is, when it actually materializes, normally cut short – as in Baker’s case, interrupted by the ring of the telephone which ‘always [gives her] a shock.’<sup>676</sup> She marks this by comically stuffing a pillow under her overall in readiness for the next available opportunity, a gesture that resembles the pear tucked away in her pocket awaiting a throw at the furniture. A (deliberate) contrast to enjoying repose is the action that ensues, that of ‘[r]oaming around the kitchen from task to task.’<sup>677</sup> According to Baker, it represents the pinnacle of housework which requires ‘a great deal of skill and versatility’<sup>678</sup> and is akin to ‘gliding through the sky.’<sup>679</sup> The secret to this action is that it involves jumping between tasks and completing them little by little rather than one at a time. By way of this method, the domestic emerges as a spacious and varied territory which the occupant is slowly bringing under their command, gradually assembling the scattered fragments of habitational comportment into a coherent and agreeable entirety.

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

The interweaving of reflections, actions and marks in *Kitchen Show* conjures up an identifiable configuration of dwelling that consists of personal habits, household duties as well as intimate emotional states. The sense of home that surfaces through the piece exhibits fluid structures of affective belonging, allowing spectators to easily migrate between the particular situation performed by Baker and their own applicable conceptions of inhabitation. As the artist has remarked to theatre scholar Helen Iball, ‘people relate to these shows by constantly and to an extraordinary degree relating them to their own experiences [and they] recognise [how] this [habitational] aspect of their lives goes unacknowledged.’<sup>680</sup> What is more, Bobby Baker’s imaginative domestic worlds in performance offer a celebration of the ostensibly prosaic aspects of daily life, transmitting a heartening sincerity and a revitalising energy.

The concluding scene of *Kitchen Show* brings to the fore the marks that the artist has been assembling through the performing of actions. In addition to the wooden spoon in her hair and the pear in her pocket, these include margarine applied to her face as kind of moisturizer, a spinach leaf pinned to her overall and gradually more outrageous ideas such as cleaning cloth tucked ‘between the sides of my heels and my slippers so that they fly out behind’<sup>681</sup> or knee pads which Bobby uses as protective gear when kneeling to say the Lord’s Prayer. To make these incursions to her body clearly visible, Baker places a cake stand on top of the kitchen table, creating a sort of plinth. She places one foot on this raised platform and proceeds to turn so as to allow everybody to appreciate the collection of marks as ‘it’s the image they all make together that matters most.’<sup>682</sup> Her pose and the revolving movement suggest a sort of comical crossover between a ballerina musical jewellery box and the French painter and sculptor Edgar Degas’ “Grande Arabesque” (1890) sculpture, connecting and subverting ideas of grace and discipline in the display of a dutiful femininity,

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<sup>680</sup> Helen Iball, “Daily Life 1: Kitchen Show” in Bobby Baker, *Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 188.

<sup>681</sup> Bobby Baker, “Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public” in *Bobby Baker: Redeeming Features of Daily Life*, eds. Bobby Baker and Michèle Barrett (London: Routledge, 2007), 170.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*



historically part of the preconceived notions of womanhood that, in many ways, continue to shape the cultural perception of gender.

### **Baker's Homes: Perseverance and Compassion**

Baker's feminist posture, as developed through her earlier work, carries over into the conceptual mould of *Kitchen Show* but once again lingers quietly within the dramaturgical structure or, rather, requires an attentive spectatorial eye to detect its workings. That she is the sole performer in the space – a woman firmly situated in the kitchen and for whom the room is the locus of identity – is in itself a powerful feminist statement but cunningly shifted into the background of attention by her going garrulously about the chores and unconventionally covering herself in all kinds of household items. The imminence of Bobby's habitational practice which traces a range of performativities of home is accentuated by elements of self-effacing humour which flirts with absurdity. The endings to *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* and *Cooks Dems* – dancing to music enveloped in a heavily soiled sheet and dressed into baking accessories while picking up litter respectively – attest to this as they are similarly designed to inculcate a humorous interpretation on the works and in doing so, purportedly, classify Baker as an eccentric entertainer. Underneath what we might call a misconceived façade resides a wealth of meanings and beliefs that affect the core of being and build human identity, substantiating Bobby Baker as a particularly incisive and highly innovative artist of our time.

The beginning of Baker's artistic career in the mid-seventies coincides with the heyday of feminist second-wave and in particular materialist feminist voices campaigning against gender inequality, inspired by history-altering efforts of their predecessors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This new generation of activists believed that the cultural transformation previously achieved by granting women access to higher education and the right to vote had, after the two World Wars, lost its drive, giving rise to new forms of discrimination. These stemmed, according to social scientist Joanne Hollows, from 'the idea that the existence of gendered, separate spheres was a "natural" way of organising

social life'<sup>683</sup> and, by extension, it was 'women's "natural" predisposition'<sup>684</sup> to remain confined to the private sphere as guardians of domesticity, living through and for their husbands and children.

Bobby Baker's work exhibits a thorough understanding of the history of feminist thought and activism but simultaneously advances an autonomous, modern-day position based on her own confrontations with gender inequality. Baker in some ways represents the politically emancipated and educated figure of the second half of the twentieth century that regressed into social isolation and passivity dictated by the responsibilities of motherhood, but in her work she nevertheless refuses to commit to a single ideological perspective within the feminist project. She strives instead to assemble the fleeting vectors of the gender polemics so as to harness them under the headings of sympathy and generosity. In her oeuvre home is necessarily an intersection of multiple and simultaneously operating trajectories but the key outcome of these junctures is the manifestation of compassion and care produced through a woman's unceasing effort and sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Created in the late eighties and early nineties, the works examined in this chapter offer an insight into the pleasures and struggles of organising and maintaining a home life and demonstrate how the act of being at home and the processes of making home function as expressions of identity and the ways in which we communicate our self to the wider environment we form part of. Baker is, by her own admission, the conduit of the representation of a decidedly middle-class experience of home, a feature she not only acknowledges but also interrogates. In *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* and *Cooks Dems* she predominantly explores the meanings of food and its preparation to highlight their cultural connection to notions of home and the family. She embraces cooking as a communicational code of her art but also the language of forming and preserving interpersonal relationships, constituting it as a foundational performativity of domestic habitation. In *Kitchen Show* she takes a step into a slightly different direction and inducts

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<sup>683</sup> Joanne Hollows, *Domestic Cultures* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 54.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

audiences into the pulsation of her at-homeness to reveal touching moments of privacy and search in them a collective consciousness that carries a transportive quality.

All three pieces constitute a sort of prelude to Baker's *Daily Life Series*, a 'Domestic Quintet' of shows around everyday routines of life<sup>685</sup> produced over a period of a decade and of which *Kitchen Show* eventually came to constitute part one. Conceptually diverse and thematically wide-ranging, the remaining four works of the series are not as closely concerned with the minutiae of housework and revealing the ostensibly mundane aspects of domestic habitation. Although they retain the intimate, confessional tone (that ubiquitous feature of Baker's art) they are nevertheless less equipped to incite the audiences' figurative transportation by way of theatre and performance to their own conceptions of home – the foremost preoccupation of this thesis.

Baker's examination of habitational practices and the position of women within the home recalls, and measures up to, that of Henrik Ibsen's – albeit over a hundred years after Nora so defiantly probed the questions of gender by problematizing the concerns of the end-of-nineteenth-century feminism. Baker, however, finds yet another, and arguably more important, forerunner in Ibsen's opus. Through her engagement with housework, Gina of *The Wild Duck* emerges as a model of the feminine that has an equally significant bearing on the conception of womanhood compared to that of Nora; their contradictory feminist positions represent the foundation of Baker's ideological encounter with the notion of motherhood and her yearning for expression through the medium of art. Absorbed into the perceived detritus of the everyday, Bobby Baker subverts her marginal predicament into spirited, heartfelt and, without exception, profoundly moving narratives of domestic existence, leaving an unmissable imprint of emotional ownership on her domestic space and on all those who have had the fortune of engaging with her work.

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<sup>685</sup> The other four shows include *How to Shop* (1993), *Take a Peek!* (1995), *Grown-Up School* (1999) and *Box Story* (2001).

## **Performative Expressions of Home and Their Transportive Value**

This thesis has examined the representations of home in the works of modernist playwright Henrik Ibsen and postmodernist artists Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker, all of whom make home a central subject of their oeuvres. It has proposed that home is a performative entity which consists of the performative expressions of home – a diverse variety of concepts, actions, intentions, processes, symbols and emotions which possess dynamic potential for the transformation of social structures. It has further argued that the performativities of home instigate a figurative transportation, a notion conceived by philosopher Martin Heidegger which denotes a profound cognitive experience of spectatorial reflection in an encounter with art. To draw attention to and analyse the transportive qualities in the work of Ibsen, Hatoum and Baker the thesis has undertaken a comprehensive dramaturgical analysis of their works, considering a range of critical disciplines and perspectives.

The thesis has adopted the figure of Henrik Ibsen as a sort of conceptual precursor to the other two artists. This distinction is primarily based on the formative role of modern drama – the genre of theatre that Ibsen inaugurates – in the development of the question of home in the theatrical art. Therefore, while Chapter 1 has focused solely on the Norwegian dramatist's representations of home, Chapters 2 and 3 have related both Hatoum and Baker (back) to Ibsen, positioning his treatment of home as a kind of lens to the contemporary artists. But though Chapters 2 and 3 have carried out a comparative analysis, they have also left room for a sustained examination of Hatoum's and Baker's pieces not in direct relation to Ibsen.

The first chapter, in three parts, has considered the representations of home in the prose plays of Henrik Ibsen. Part I has offered a brief segment on Ibsen's own relationship to home, proposing that his experiences may have shaped his sensibility to the questions of

home. The subsequent sections of Part I have located Ibsen's dramatic examination of home in the theatrical landscape of his time, considering the key influences such as the traditions of the melodrama and the well-made play and the theoretical writings on the theatre that led him towards the conception of modern drama.

Part II has examined Ibsen's treatment of home across five plays – *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Master Builder* and *John Gabriel Borkman* – and has argued that there exist two key (dramaturgical) building blocks of the performativity of home in them: the material culture of the home and the characters' domestic dispositions, that is, their behaviours and the ways they interact with each other. The discussion in the ensuing sections has moved to the individual selected plays with *A Doll's House*, considered as the vantage point for the performative expressions of home in his drama. *Ghosts* and *The Master Builder* have been considered jointly through the performative expressions of (home) building and homelessness while *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman* have been analysed through the tension between the domestic space and the spaces beyond its confines – the interior and the outside.

The final part of the first chapter, Part III, has dealt with two points: the denial of the figurative transportation by the spectators in Ibsen's own time period and his questioning of the limitations of the genre through the entity of the domestic space. I have argued that while the thesis examines transportivity as a given, the original audiences were not in a position to unanimously accept this conceit due to a range of social pressures. The chapter has closed with a section on Ibsen's pushing at the conventions of realistic drama, in particular, the spatial limitations of the domestic setting. I have shown that his prose oeuvre brings a progressive opening of the domestic – from *A Doll's House* to *John Gabriel Borkman* – which has served to highlight his artistic thirst for experimentation, thereby allowing us to consider his work in relation to Mona Hatoum and Bobby Baker.

The second chapter has explored the questions of home and displacement and has related Ibsen's prose plays to the work of sculptor and installationist Mona Hatoum. The discussion, divided into four parts, began with the claim that the figurative transportation in

Hatoum's art invariably stems from her evocation of destruction and loss. I have also proposed that her representations of home commonly derive from personal experiences as a child of Palestinian refugees who has been scarred by feelings of dislocation and uncertainty. The recurring biographical traits in Hatoum's work have allowed me to establish a link with Henrik Ibsen whose life too, as I have demonstrated (also in Chapter 1), has been marked by a sense of dislodgment and distance from the homeland.

I have posited that the connection between the artists lies in the figure of exile and have theorized this through a reading of the concept of the miniature in the philosophy of Gaston Bachelard. To complete this argument I have reconciled the differing political, cultural and historical circumstances of the artists' exiles and have argued that their situations can be looked at through the lens of the idea of the nation-state. This has led me to conclude that in the relationship between Ibsen and Hatoum exile comes to constitute a principal performative expression of home and that the entity of geographical distance compels them to use the concept of the miniature as an approach to artistic creation.

The third part of the chapter has identified three strands in Hatoum's body of work that draw parallels to Ibsen's plays. Firstly, large installations of domestic spaces which I have analysed through a rejection of Michael Fried's claim that both theatre and installation are redundant art practices and unable to critically engage audiences. Secondly, Hatoum's sculptures of a range of domestic objects which, I have proposed, possess an internal dramaturgy that resembles Gustav Freytag's pyramid of dramatic action. And finally, the parallel between Hatoum's maps of the world which arouse the contrasting qualities of intimacy (or tranquillity) and threat which, I have claimed, are reminiscent of Ibsen's integration of the domestic space with the (outside) environment in *The Wild Duck* and *John Gabriel Borkman*.

The fourth part has examined Hatoum's renowned map installation *Present Tense* which relates to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. I have looked at this work independently of Ibsen on account of its global resonance and the continuously unpredictable political situation in the Middle East. As I have argued, at the root of this

conflict is a basic human need for belonging and as politics appears unable to resolve this challenge I have wondered whether art might contribute to a resolution.

In Chapter 3, I have investigated home as a gendered concept and have brought Henrik Ibsen into dialogue with the work of performance artist Bobby Baker. The chapter, in three parts, has combined comparative analysis of Baker with Ibsen and a section on Baker's oeuvre with less immediate correspondence to the Norwegian dramatist. The first part of the chapter has been conceived as a series of "encounters" starting with the analysis of the performative expressions of home in Baker's seminal piece *Drawing on A Mother's Experience*. I have contended that the themes explored by the artist enable her to "meet" with two of Ibsen's characters, Nora Helmer and Gina Ekdal. I have argued that *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* establishes a parallel with *A Doll's House* through the problematic of gender inequality, producing as powerful articulation of feminism at the end of the twentieth century as Ibsen's play created more than a hundred years earlier.

I have further expanded that while Baker conveys her anger about feeling confined to the home she also communicates a sense of excitement about the unexpected ways in which the domestic space can be experienced as rewarding. This, I have argued, aligns Baker with Gina a loving mother and housewife who always puts the needs of the members of her family before her own. I have put forward that the parallel with Bobby Baker situates Gina as a precursor of the postulates of the second-wave of feminism and despite the fact that their historical, that is, political and cultural circumstances differ, they also have a great deal in common.

Extensive analyses of *A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck* have already featured in the first chapter of the thesis, but I have re-engaged with them anew with a specific (and different) focus so as to complement and refine the existing discussion. In the case of Nora, I have looked at how Ibsen's construction of the character echoes with some of the leading voices of the first-wave of feminism in the nineteenth century as Nora Helmer has come to represent one of the most enduring symbols of the cause which continues to provoke inspiration.

Part II of the chapter has dealt with the piece *Cook Dems* which in many ways continues the ideas of its predecessor. I have examined the work through the lens of the artist's employment of food as a performative expression of home which complements that of housework in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*. I have shown that food enables Baker to both re-assert her identity as a woman as well as question the gendered social "norms". The final part of Chapter 3 has explored *Kitchen Show* which originally took place in Baker's own home. I have expanded on the tradition of site-specific performance at home, contending that it can be found in a number of periods of history and artistic movements although it appears to not have been widely theorized in scholarship. The last section of the chapter has examined *Kitchen Show* in more detail, proposing that its structure of "actions" and "marks" comprises or corresponds to performative expressions of home through which the familiar household routines become the drivers or conduits of a figurative transportation to one's own sense of habitation and in particular one's emotional investment in the dwelling space.



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